2026 COLLEGE FOOTBALL PREVIEW

Athlon Sports

138

FBS TEAM
PREVIEWS

OHIO STATE WR
JEREMIAH SMITH

MICHIGAN QB
BRYCE UNDERWOOD

INDIANA WR
CHARLIE BECKER

NOTRE DAME QB
CJ CARR

INSIDE

THE ATHLON INTERVIEW:
CURT CIGNETTI

HEADING SOUTH
WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE SEC?

PLAYOFF AND
BOWL PROJECTIONS

NATIONAL
UNIT RANKINGS

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EDITOR'S LETTER

You might have done a double-take when you saw the provocative question we pose on the cover of this year's college football preview. And granted, it's slightly tongue-in-cheek. After all, there's really nothing "wrong" with the SEC per se.

But when you're the conference — and the region of the country — where It Just Means More™, failing to earn your perceived birthright (a national championship in college football) for three years running is a cause for concern, if not outright panic.

It's undeniable: The balance of power has shifted northward. The Big Ten is in its ascendancy, while the SEC is left wondering what just happened.

We decided to do a deep dive into this current state of affairs, and who better to assess the SEC's "decline" than longtime college football observer and scribe Dennis Dodd? In his feature story "Whatever Happened to the SEC?" on p. 46 of this year's preview, Dennis fixes his gaze on the cracks in the SEC's once-impenetrable façade. A league that hoarded national titles at a gluttonous rate is suddenly in an undeniable recession, having now missed the national championship game for three straight seasons. The league went an unconscionable 4-10 during the most recent postseason.

In the final line of his story, Dennis proposes a solution that once would have been unthinkable for SEC teams and their fan bases: Be more like Indiana. That's right, that Midwestern basketball school did something no SEC school has ever done: It went 16-0 in football. One highlight of that national championship run was a 38-3 demolition of Alabama that Paul Finebaum referred to as the SEC's "Waterloo."

Hoosiers head coach Curt Cignetti introduced himself to the wider college football world in late 2023 by saying, "I win. Google me." And he's been nothing but true to his word. The architect of the most unlikely reclamation project since Bill Snyder at Kansas State is now the sport's unexpected kingpin.

Cignetti sat down with *Athlon Sports* during a brief pause in his whirlwind offseason to discuss what he and his program can do for an encore. Another undefeated season seems unlikely, but we won't put anything past him at this point. You can find our Q&A with college football's coach of the moment on p. 42.

Change is seemingly the one constant in college football — the number of FBS teams has expanded to 138 this season with the addition of North Dakota State and Sacramento State, and another round of conference realignment has yielded the rebirth of the Pac-12.

Our very own college football savant, Steven Lassan, is charged with keeping tabs on the constant changes sweeping the sport, and his fingerprints are all over this magazine, from the predictions to the annual unit rankings to the All-America and all-conference teams. Many thanks go to Steven and to editors Kyle Wood, Mark Ross and Ben Weinrib, as well as our 97 contributing writers (I counted), who all make this publication possible. And assembling it all into a visually appealing package is our longtime creative director Matt Taliaferro. It's a team effort, and we have the best team in the business.

Enjoy the magazine, and enjoy the season.

Rob Doster

ROB DOSTER, MANAGING EDITOR

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THE ARENA

Athlon Sports

ATHLON SPORTS

ROB DOSTER*
MANAGING EDITOR

MATT TALIAFERRO
CREATIVE DIRECTOR

STEVEN LASSAN
COLLEGE FOOTBALL EDITOR

KYLE WOOD
SENIOR EDITOR

MARK ROSS*
EDITOR

BEN WEINRIB*
EDITOR

*Consultant

CORPORATE

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THOMAS NEUMANN
EDITOR IN CHIEF, ATHLON SPORTS

SHARI HANSHON
PRODUCT MANAGER

SHASHIKA BALDWIN
HEAD OF PRINT SERVICES AND PRODUCTION

McCLATCHY LIFESTYLE & ENTERTAINMENT

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1601 ALHAMBRA BOULEVARD, SUITE 100,
SACRAMENTO, CA 95816
(800) 749–7733

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PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

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209	ULM

Contributing Writers

Joe Arruda, Mike Ashley, Thomas Ashworth, Bob Asmussen, Stan Awtrey, James Baca, Hunter Bailey, Stephen Bailey, Colten Bartholomew, Joe Bendel, Chad Bishop, Andy Bitter, A.J. Black, Alan Blondin, Chip Brown, Michael Bruntz, Olin Buchanan, Keff Ciardello, David Cloninger, Joel Coleman, Keenan Cummings, Tom Dienhart, Dennis Dodd, Jay Drew, Joseph Duarte, Billy Embody, Gary Ferman, Noah Fleischman, Brian Fonseca, Colton Foster, Chapel Fowler, Josh Furlong, Shaun Goodwin, Andy Greder, Jon Hale, Pat Harty, Brandon Helwig, Matt Hinton, Brian Howell, Sal Interdonato, Steve Irvine, Steven Johnson, Joey Johnston, Chris Karpman, Michael Katz, Kirk Kenney, Robert Kuwada, Steven Lassan, Chris Level, Dustin Lewis, Adam Lichtenstein, Greg Luca, Kevin Lytle, Greg Madia, Jon Manson, Aaron McMann, Shane Mettlen, Rob Moseley, Tom Murphy, Jeff Nations, Matt Newton, Keegan Nickoson, Mike Niziolek, Conor O'Neill, Ben Parker/Stanford Rivals Network, Michael Peters, Tim Prister, Jeremy Rakes, Jeff Rapp, Scott Rabalais, Mike Rodak, Jake Rowe, Kyle Rowland, Chris Solari, Guerry Smith, Zach Smith, Justin Spears, Isaac Streeter, Phil Stukenborg, Shelby Swanson, Noah Taylor, Edgar Thompson, Roman Tomashoff, Kevin Tresolini, Bill Trocchi, Kevin Turbeville, Jason Turner, Bill Wagner, Ryan Wallen, Robbie Weinstein, Chris Williams, Steve Wiseman, Mark Wogenrich, Kyle Wood, Greg Woods, Scott Wright

Cover Photography

Bachmeier: James Guillory-Imagn Images; Baugh: Maria Lysaker-Imagn Images; Bray: Ben Queen-Imagn Images; Becker: Sam Navarro-Imagn Images; Brown: Charles LeClaire-Imagn Images; Carr: Charles LeClaire-Imagn Images; Chambliss: Petre Thomas-Imagn Images; Coleman-Williams: Nelson Chenault-Imagn Images; Dickey: James Snook-Imagn Images; Fletcher Jr.: Mark J. Rebilas-Imagn Images; Franklin: Brian Bishop-Imagn Images; Hardy: Steve Roberts-Imagn Images; Hunter: Tommy Gilligan-Imagn Images; Kiffin: Matthew Hinton-Imagn Images; Maiava: Trevor Ruszkowski-Imagn Images; Manning: Jerome Miron-Imagn Images; Mateer: Kevin Jairaj-Imagn Images; D. Moore: Troy Wayrynen-Imagn Images; T.J. Moore: Jim Dedmon-Imagn Images; Moulton: Steve Roberts-Imagn Images; Reed: Michael Caterina-Imagn Images; Robinson: Melina Myers-Imagn Images; Smith: Adam Cairns/Columbus Dispatch; Staley: Angelina Alcantar/News Sentinel; Sellers: Denny Medley-Imagn Images; Stockton: Matt Pendleton-Imagn Images; Tracy: Mark J. Rebilas-Imagn Images; Underwood: Matt Pendleton-Imagn Images; Weigman: Mark J. Rebilas-Imagn Images; Williams Jr.: Jayne Kamin-Oncea-Imagn Images

TOP 25

BY STEVEN LASSAN

1. OHIO STATE

The Buckeyes appeared to be the team to beat for most of the '25 season. However, head coach Ryan Day's squad stumbled late with back-to-back losses to Indiana in the Big Ten Championship Game and to Miami (Fla.) in the College Football Playoff quarterfinals. That two-game losing streak is likely to fuel Ohio State in '26. Quarterback Julian Sayin should be better in his second year as the starter, and wide receiver **Jeremiah Smith** is back to dominate opposing defensive backs as arguably the top returning player in college football. Sayin and Smith will be even more dangerous if the ground attack provides a little more support under new offensive coordinator Arthur Smith. Safety Caleb Downs, linebackers Sonny Styles and Arvell Reese and defensive lineman Kayden McDonald are just a few of the top names departing a suffocating defense. However, it's hard to doubt coordinator Matt Patricia's ability to keep this unit near the top of the Big Ten this season after a stellar debut last fall. A schedule that includes road trips to Texas, Indiana and USC and a home game against Oregon won't be easy.

JOIN STEVEN LASSAN AT **ATHLONSPORTS.COM** FOR IN-DEPTH COLLEGE FOOTBALL COVERAGE THROUGHOUT THE SEASON

STEVE SARKISIAN (LEFT) AND KIRBY SMART

2. GEORGIA

The Bulldogs have won back-to-back SEC championships, but head coach Kirby Smart's team is looking for its first playoff win since 2022. That drought seems poised to end in '26. Smart has developed a deep roster with talent overflowing in spots. Eight starters are back on defense, including a pair of standouts in the secondary — cornerback Ellis Robinson IV and safety KJ Bolden. Sophomore Elijah Griffin is the next star game-wrecker in the defensive trenches. After a solid debut last season, quarterback Gunner Stockton aims to take the next step in '26. Running back Nate Frazier headlines one of the deepest backfields in the nation, and three returning starters form the foundation of a solid offensive line. A revamped receiving corps is arguably the team's biggest concern. However, if Smart and offensive coordinator Mike Bobo find the right mix, and the passing game generates a few more big plays in '26, Georgia can return to the top step of college football.

3. TEXAS

A year after failing to meet high expectations, the Longhorns seemingly took the right steps this offseason to erase that disappointment. Quarterback Arch Manning played his best ball down the stretch and enters his second year as the full-time starter more comfortable in head coach Steve Sarkisian's offense. Aiding Manning is an improved offensive line, along with key transfer pickups in receiver Cam Coleman (Auburn) and running backs Hollywood Smothers (NC State) and Raleek Brown (Arizona State). Defense hasn't been a major concern in Austin, but Sarkisian took a swing at transforming this unit into an elite group by hiring long-time coordinator Will Muschamp. End Colin Simmons should thrive in Muschamp's aggressive scheme, with transfer pickups at linebacker in Rasheem Biles (Pitt) and cornerback Bo Mascoe (Rutgers) plugging key voids. A Week 2 date against Ohio State is an opportunity for revenge. Late-season road trips to LSU and Texas A&M loom large for the Longhorns' hopes of an SEC title.

OPPOSITE: ADAM CAIRNS/COLUMBUS DISPATCH;

4. NOTRE DAME

After last year's playoff snub, the '26 season is all about revenge for the Fighting Irish. And making the postseason isn't simply the goal for Notre Dame — head coach Marcus Freeman's team has all of the ingredients to bring a national title back to South Bend. Quarterback CJ Carr navigated early ups and downs last season to emerge as one of the top signal-callers in the nation. The Fighting Irish return one of the deeper receiving corps the program has assembled in recent years, and the ground game will remain strong behind Aneyas Williams with Jeremiyah Love off to the NFL. How the line jells after a couple of players missed spring practice due to injury is the biggest concern on offense. After a rocky start, Notre Dame's defense played significantly better down the stretch. No opponent scored more than 24 points over the final nine games. Freeman's team could be favored in all 12 of its regular-season contests.

JOSH HOOVER

5. INDIANA

The Hoosiers lost a handful of key players from last season's championship squad, but head coach Curt Cignetti's team isn't going anywhere. Both sides of the ball found reinforcements in the portal, with quarterback Josh Hoover (TCU) and receiver Nick Marsh (Michigan State) among the players poised for the biggest impact.

DANTE MOORE

6. OREGON

All of the pieces are in place for Oregon to win its first national title. Quarterback Dante Moore and a group of key defenders all passed on the NFL for one more season in Eugene. A road trip to Ohio State in November could decide a spot in the Big Ten Championship Game.

7. MIAMI (FLA.)

Head coach Mario Cristobal's team is loaded for another run at the national title after landing Duke transfer quarterback Darian Mensah to pair with some of the ACC's top skill talent in running back Mark Fletcher Jr. and receiver Malachi Toney. Six starters return on a defense that led the ACC in fewest points per game allowed (14.8).

MARK FLETCHER JR.

8. OKLAHOMA

The Sooners have a few holes to plug on defense, but head coach Brent Venables will find a way to keep this unit near the top of the SEC. An improved supporting cast and offensive line should help quarterback John Mateer take a step forward after an up-and-down (and injury-plagued) debut in Norman last year.

9. TEXAS A&M

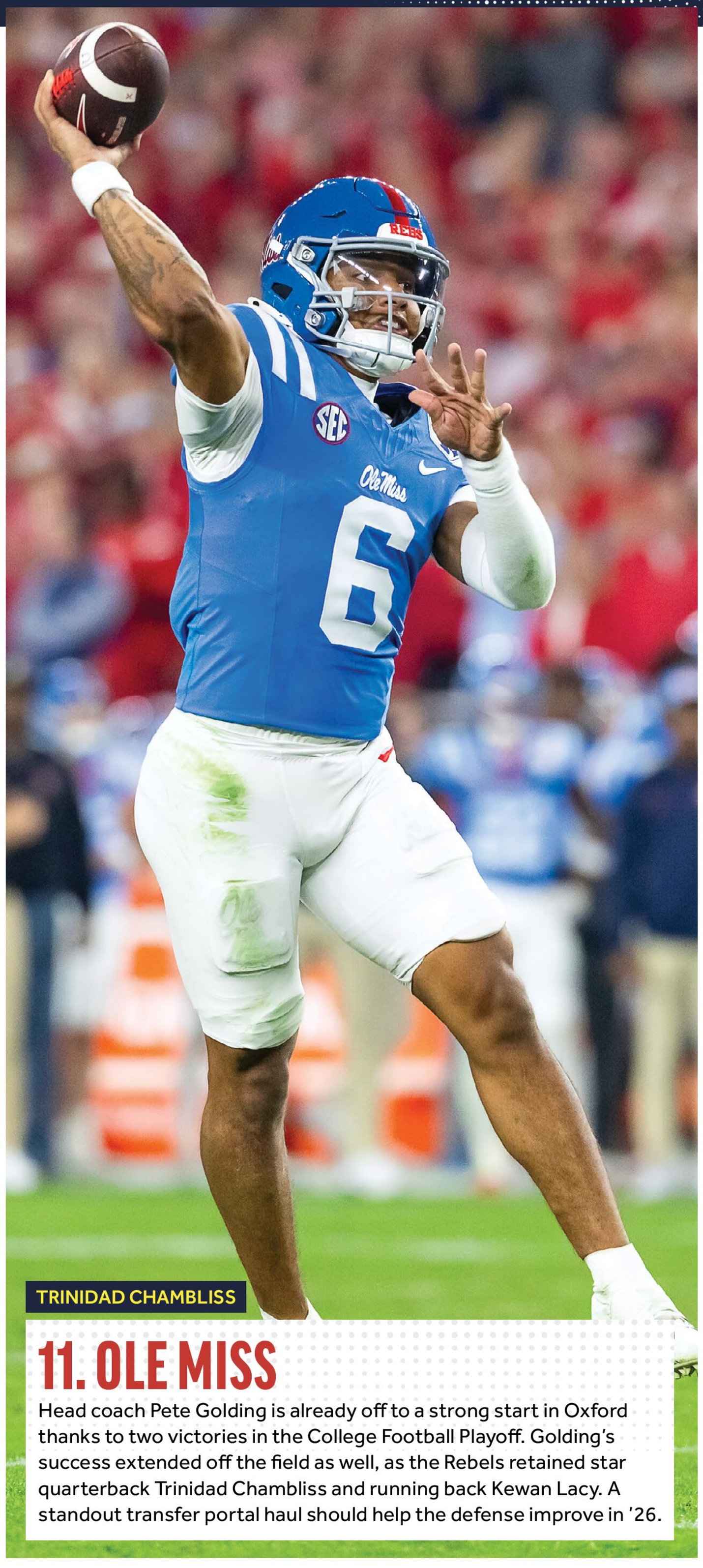
After a first-round playoff exit last season, the Aggies have their sights set on a deeper run in '26. To accomplish that, quarterback Marcel Reed has to elevate his play under first-time play-caller Holmon Wiggins. A revamped offensive line is also a concern, but head coach Mike Elko's defense will be strong once again.

10. LSU

New head coach Lane Kiffin won't get much of a honeymoon period in Baton Rouge. With a massive investment in the new staff and player acquisition and retention, the expectation is for the Bayou Bengals to make the playoff. Quarterback Sam Leavitt's health is one of the SEC's top X-factors in '26.

LANE KIFFIN

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: CHRIS PIETSCH/THE REGISTER-GUARD; MATTHEW HINTON-IMAGN IMAGES; MARK J. REBILAS-IMAGN IMAGES



TRINIDAD CHAMBLISS

FROM LEFT: MARK J. REBILAS-IMAGN IMAGES

11. OLE MISS

Head coach Pete Golding is already off to a strong start in Oxford thanks to two victories in the College Football Playoff. Golding's success extended off the field as well, as the Rebels retained star quarterback Trinidad Chambliss and running back Kewan Lacy. A standout transfer portal haul should help the defense improve in '26.

12. TEXAS TECH

The Red Raiders are heavy favorites to win the Big 12 once again. However, the uncertainty surrounding quarterback Brendan Sorsby's status narrowed the gap to the rest of the conference. Head coach Joey McGuire's team needs to rely on a deep backfield and standout defense until potential new starting quarterback Will Hammond is 100% after a '25 knee injury.

13. MICHIGAN

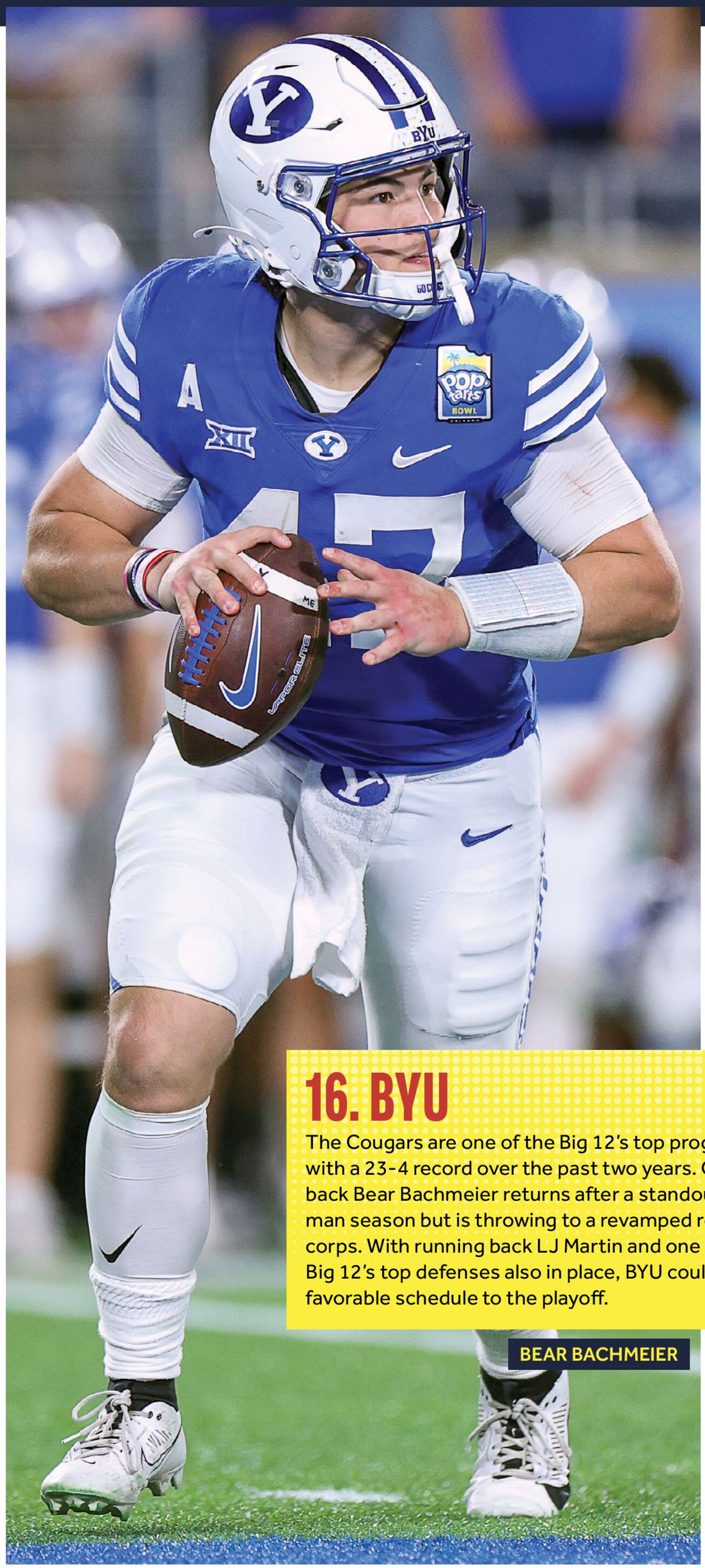
New head coach Kyle Whittingham inherits a team poised to contend for the playoff. The Wolverines will be strong once again on defense, but the development of dynamic sophomore quarterback Bryce Underwood looms large against a schedule that includes matchups against Oklahoma, Indiana, Oregon and Ohio State. Jordan Marshall and true freshman Savion Hiter form one of the top backfield tandems in the nation.

14. USC

Quarterback Jayden Maiava and an experienced offensive line are back on a high-powered offense, but standout receivers Makai Lemon and Ja'Kobi Lane must be replaced. Hopes of a College Football Playoff run hinge on how far new coordinator Gary Patterson can improve the defense.

15. ALABAMA

The Crimson Tide have more question marks than usual, with only five returning starters. But head coach Kalen DeBoer's team has a favorable schedule and could once again make the College Football Playoff if the ground game improves behind a revamped offensive line. Austin Mack and Keelon Russell are expected to continue their quarterback battle into the fall.



BEAR BACHMEIER

16. BYU

The Cougars are one of the Big 12's top programs, with a 23-4 record over the past two years. Quarterback Bear Bachmeier returns after a standout freshman season but is throwing to a revamped receiving corps. With running back LJ Martin and one of the Big 12's top defenses also in place, BYU could ride a favorable schedule to the playoff.

JEDD FISCH

17. WASHINGTON

If the Huskies are going to take the next step after a nine-win campaign in 2025, head coach Jedd Fisch must restock the supporting cast around quarterback Demond Williams Jr. and reload a defense that returns only four starters. The schedule includes tough road trips to USC and Oregon.

18. PENN STATE

After last year's disappointing seven-win season, expectations are significantly lower this fall in Happy Valley. New head coach Matt Campbell brought in 40 transfers, with quarterback Rocco Becht among those following him from Iowa State. The schedule breaks in Penn State's favor by missing Ohio State, Oregon and Indiana.

19. HOUSTON

The Cougars improved their win total by six games from 2024 to '25. Head coach Willie Fritz's squad has its sights set on another step forward into Big 12 title contention, especially with quarterback Conner Weigman returning and Oregon transfer running back Makhi Hughes solidifying the ground game.

20. UTAH

New head coach Morgan Scalley should find a way to keep Utah's defense among the best in the Big 12. How the Utes rebuild up front and transition to new offensive coordinator Kevin McGiven will decide how high this team climbs in the conference. The dynamic quarterback duo of Devon Dampier and Byrd Ficklin leads the way.

FROM LEFT: NATHAN RAY SEEBECK-IMAGN IMAGES; JULIA HANSEN/IOWA CITY PRESS-CIT

DESEAN BISHOP

21. TENNESSEE

Head coach Josh Heupel took steps to fix Tennessee's struggling defense by hiring veteran coordinator Jim Knowles and investing heavily in impact transfers. The Volunteers are breaking in a new quarterback; however, Heupel's team returns some of the SEC's top skill talent in running back DeSean Bishop and receiver Braylon Staley to go with an experienced offensive line.

22. SMU

The Mustangs are 14-2 in ACC play since joining the league in '24. Head coach Rhett Lashlee's squad could be the biggest threat to Miami (Fla.) with quarterback Kevin Jennings piloting a high-powered offense featuring new faces from the portal at the skill spots. New defensive play-caller Maurice Crum Jr. has holes to fill on a defense that held conference opponents to 17.8 points per game last year.

23. LOUISVILLE

After an injury-plagued season, along with a brief entry into the portal, running back Isaac Brown is back to power the Cardinals' ACC title hopes. Head coach Jeff Brohm also hopes Ohio State transfer Lincoln Kienholz provides needed consistency and big-play ability at quarterback. Edge rusher Clev Lubin headlines five returning starters on defense.

24. BOISE STATE

Behind quarterback Maddux Madsen and a standout one-two punch at running back in Dylan Riley and Sire Gaines, Boise State is a heavy favorite to win the Pac-12 and take the top spot among Group of 6 conferences in the playoff rankings. A Week 1 trip to Oregon is a huge opportunity for head coach Spencer Danielson's team.

KIRK FERENTZ

25. IOWA

The Hawkeyes return only six starters and have several holes to fill from a standout '25 defense. However, head coach Kirk Ferentz and his staff usually find the right answers. Also, a rock-solid offensive line and deep stable of running backs should help ease the transition to a new quarterback.

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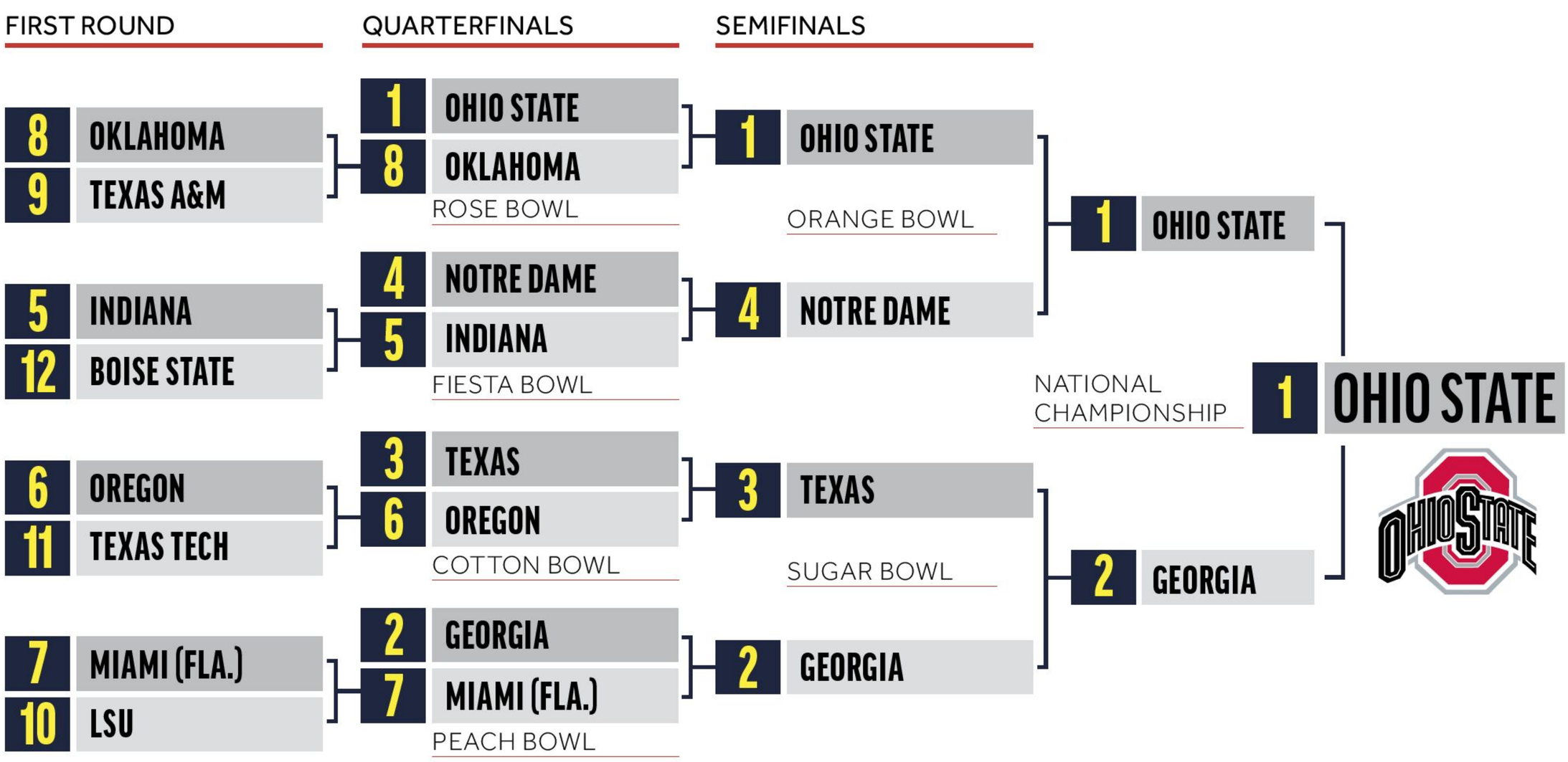
2026

PLAYOFF BRACKET



FIRST-ROUND BYES:
OHIO STATE, GEORGIA, TEXAS, NOTRE DAME

FROM PAGE 11

26. Florida
27. Clemson
28. South Carolina
29. Missouri
30. Virginia Tech
31. Kansas State
32. Arizona
33. Illinois
34. Auburn
35. Arizona State
36. Oklahoma State
37. TCU
38. Nebraska
39. Virginia
40. Pitt
41. Georgia Tech
42. Minnesota
43. UCLA
44. Mississippi State
45. Vanderbilt
46. NC State
47. California
48. Florida State
49. Kentucky
50. West Virginia
51. Arkansas
52. Kansas
53. Wake Forest
54. Duke
55. Wisconsin
56. North Carolina
57. Northwestern
58. Maryland
59. UNLV
60. Navy
61. New Mexico
62. Baylor
63. Cincinnati
64. Colorado
65. UCF
66. Memphis
67. San Diego State
68. Fresno State
69. Rutgers
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71. Syracuse
72. Michigan State
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76. South Florida
77. Hawai'i
78. North Dakota State
79. Tulane
80. Air Force
81. Troy
82. James Madison
83. Boston College
84. Stanford
85. Purdue
86. Miami (Ohio)
87. Western Michigan
88. Washington State
89. WKU
90. Temple
91. Liberty
92. Utah State
93. Texas State
94. Old Dominion
95. Marshall
96. Florida Atlantic
97. Colorado State
98. Central Michigan
99. Toledo
100. Arkansas State
101. Oregon State
102. Georgia Southern
103. UConn
104. Louisiana Tech
105. Kennesaw State
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107. Delaware
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114. Louisiana
115. South Alabama
116. San José State
117. Appalachian State
118. Buffalo
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120. Rice
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122. Bowling Green
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126. Kent State
127. Charlotte
128. Missouri State
129. New Mexico State
130. UTEP
131. ULM
132. Georgia State
133. Middle Tennessee
134. Northern Illinois
135. Ball State
136. Sacramento State
137. Sam Houston
138. UMass

2026

BOWL PROJECTIONS

POINSETTIA BOWL
Pac-12 vs. Mountain West
San Diego State vs. UNLV

SALUTE TO VETERANS
MAC vs. Sun Belt
Delaware* vs. Georgia Southern

CURE
Sun Belt vs. American/CUSA/MAC
East Carolina* vs. Western Michigan

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Sun Belt vs. American/CUSA/MAC
Arkansas State vs. Jacksonville State

XBOX
American/CUSA/MAC/Sun Belt
Old Dominion vs. Utah State*

MYRTLE BEACH
Sun Belt vs. American/CUSA/MAC
Marshall vs. Liberty

GASPARILLA
ACC vs. SEC/American
Georgia Tech vs. Memphis

FAMOUS IDAHO POTATO
Mountain West vs. MAC
North Dakota State vs. Toledo

BOCA RATON
American/CUSA/MAC/Sun Belt
Miami (Ohio) vs. Troy

NEW ORLEANS
Conference USA vs. Sun Belt
WKU vs. James Madison

FRISCO
American/CUSA/MAC/MW/Sun Belt
Louisiana Tech vs. Central Michigan

HAWAI'I
American vs. Mountain West
UCLA* vs. Hawai'i

PUERTO RICO
Pac-12 vs. Group of 6
Fresno State vs. South Florida

RATE
Big 12 vs. Big Ten
TCU vs. Illinois

FIRST RESPONDER
Big 12/American/CUSA/ACC
Cal vs. Washington State*

MILITARY
ACC vs. American
Wake Forest vs. Temple

PINSTRIPE
ACC vs. Big Ten
Pitt vs. Minnesota

FENWAY
ACC vs. American
NC State vs. Army

POP-TARTS
ACC vs. Big 12
Louisville vs. Houston

ARIZONA
MAC vs. Mountain West
Ohio vs. Air Force

NEW MEXICO
Mountain West vs. American
New Mexico vs. UTSA

GATOR
SEC vs. ACC
Alabama vs. SMU

TEXAS
SEC vs. Big 12
Missouri vs. Oklahoma State

BIRMINGHAM
SEC vs. ACC
Vanderbilt vs. Tulane*

INDEPENDENCE
Big 12 vs. Conference USA
West Virginia vs. Kennesaw State

MUSIC CITY
SEC vs. Big Ten
South Carolina vs. Nebraska

ALAMO
Big 12 vs. Pac-12
BYU vs. USC*

RELIAQUEST
SEC vs. Big Ten
Florida vs. Penn State

SUN
ACC vs. Pac-12
Virginia vs. Utah*

CITRUS
SEC vs. Big Ten
Ole Miss vs. Michigan

LAS VEGAS
Big Ten vs. Pac-12
Iowa vs. Arizona*

ARMED FORCES
Big 12 vs. American/CUSA
Arizona State vs. Navy

LIBERTY
Big 12 vs. SEC
Kansas State vs. Auburn

DUKE'S MAYO
ACC vs. SEC
Virginia Tech vs. Tennessee

HOLIDAY
ACC vs. Pac-12
Clemson vs. Washington*

COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF

FIRST ROUND
No. 5 Indiana vs. No. 12 Boise State
No. 6 Oregon vs. No. 11 Texas Tech
No. 7 Miami (Fla.) vs. No. 10 LSU
No. 8 Oklahoma vs. No. 9 Texas A&M

QUARTERFINALS
Fiesta Bowl
No. 4 Notre Dame vs. No. 5 Indiana
Cotton Bowl
No. 3 Texas vs. No. 6 Oregon
Peach Bowl
No. 2 Georgia vs. No. 7 Miami (Fla.)
Rose Bowl
No. 1 Ohio State vs. No. 8 Oklahoma

SEMIFINALS
Orange Bowl
No. 1 Ohio State vs. No. 4 Notre Dame
Sugar Bowl
No. 2 Georgia vs. No. 3 Texas

NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP
No. 1 Ohio State vs. No. 2 Georgia

*Indicates at-large team selected with conference unable to fill allotted bowl spots.

2026

ALL-AMERICA

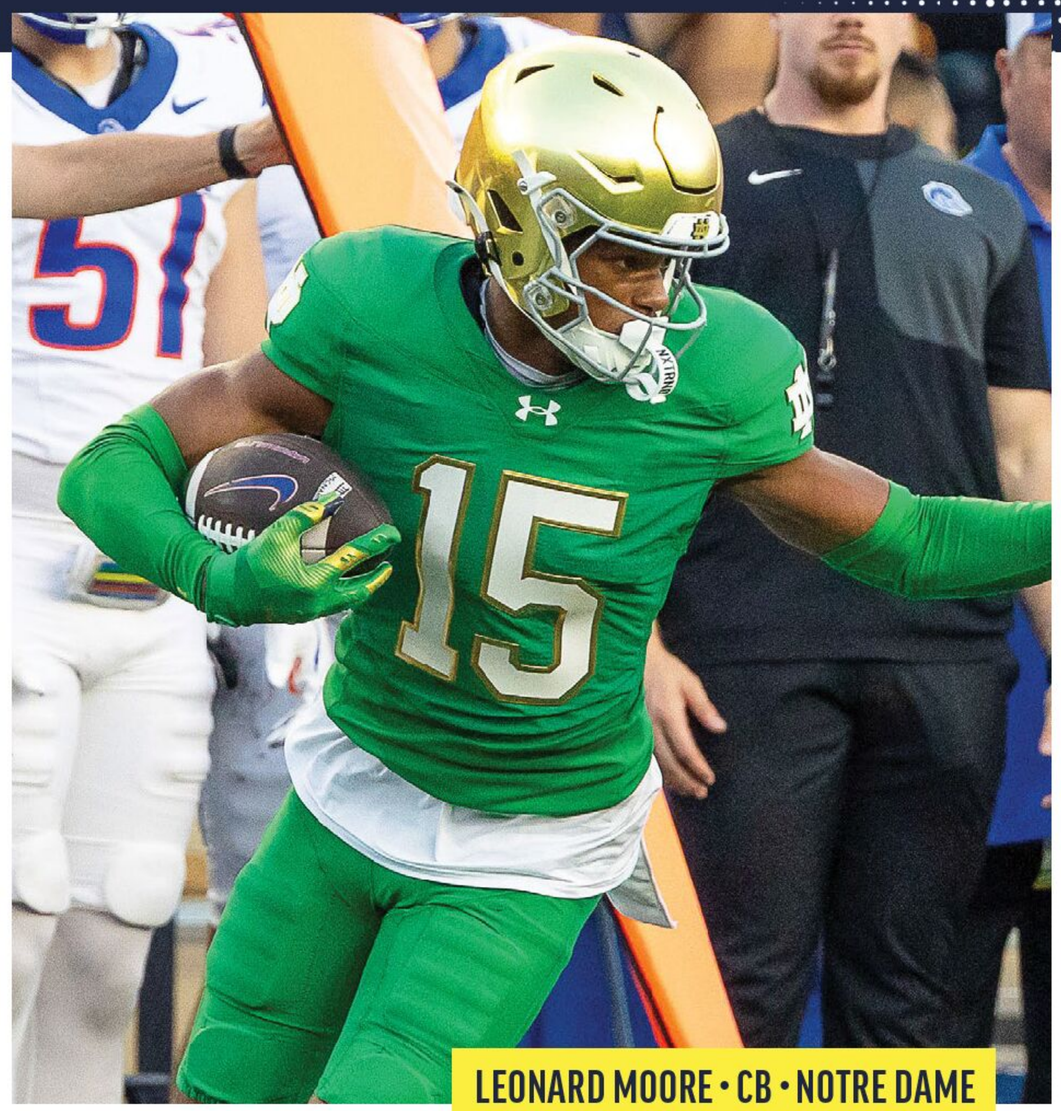
ARCH MANNING • QB • TEXAS

1ST TEAM

OFFENSE

QB	ARCH MANNING TEXAS	
RB	AHMAD HARDY MISSOURI	
RB	KEWAN LACY OLE MISS	
AP	MALACHI TONEY MIAMI (FLA.)	
WR	JEREMIAH SMITH OHIO STATE	
WR	CAM COLEMAN TEXAS	
WR	DUCE ROBINSON FLORIDA STATE	
TE	TREY'DEZ GREEN LSU	
C	IAPANI LALOULU OREGON	
OL	CARTER SMITH INDIANA	
OL	TREVOR GOOSBY TEXAS	
OL	KADE PIEPER IOWA	
OL	CAYDEN GREEN MISSOURI	

MATT PENDLETON-IMAGN IMAGES



LEONARD MOORE • CB • NOTRE DAME

ROLIJAH HARDY • LB • INDIANA

DEFENSE

DL	COLIN SIMMONS TEXAS	
DL	JOHN HENRY DALEY MICHIGAN	
DL	TYRIQUE TUCKER INDIANA	
DL	A'MAURI WASHINGTON OREGON	
LB	XAVIER ATKINS AUBURN	
LB	WHIT WEEKS LSU	
LB	RASHEEM BILES TEXAS	
LB	ROLIJAH HARDY INDIANA	
CB	LEONARD MOORE NOTRE DAME	
CB	ELLIS ROBINSON IV GEORGIA	
S	KJ BOLDEN GEORGIA	
S	BRAY HUBBARD ALABAMA	

SPECIALISTS

K	TATE SANDELL OKLAHOMA	
P	EVAN CRENSHAW TROY	
KR	DA'REALYST CLARK KENT STATE	
PR	RYAN NIBLETT TEXAS	

TATE SANDELL • K • OKLAHOMA

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: MICHAEL CATERINA-IMAGN IMAGES; MARK J. REBILAS-IMAGN IMAGES; BRYAN TERRY/THE OKLAHOMAN

2ND TEAM

OFFENSE

QB	JULIAN SAYIN OHIO STATE	
RB	JADAN BAUGH FLORIDA	
RB	ISAAC BROWN LOUISVILLE	
AP	CALEB HAWKINS OKLAHOMA STATE	
WR	MARIO CRAVER TEXAS A&M	
WR	CHARLIE BECKER INDIANA	
WR	KJ DUFF RUTGERS	
TE	JAMARI JOHNSON OREGON	
C	DREW BOBO GEORGIA	
OL	ANTHONIE KNAPP NOTRE DAME	
OL	AUSTIN SIEREVELD OHIO STATE	
OL	TREVOR LAUCK IOWA	
OL	EVAN TENGESDAHL CINCINNATI	

ISAAC BROWN • RB • LOUISVILLE

DEFENSE

DL	DAVID STONE OKLAHOMA	
DL	A.J. HOLMES JR. TEXAS TECH	
DL	ANTHONY SMITH MINNESOTA	
DL	DYLAN STEWART SOUTH CAROLINA	
LB	TEITUM TUIOTI OREGON	
LB	KIP LEWIS OKLAHOMA	
LB	ISAIAH JONES INDIANA	
LB	RAYLEN WILSON GEORGIA	
CB	BRICE POLLOCK TEXAS TECH	
CB	KELLEY JONES MISSISSIPPI STATE	
S	MARCUS RATCLIFFE TEXAS A&M	
S	AMARE FERRELL INDIANA	

SPECIALISTS

K	LUCAS CARNEIRO OLE MISS	
P	PALMER WILLIAMS BAYLOR	
KR	KOI PERICH OREGON	
PR	VICARI SWAIN SOUTH CAROLINA	

JEFF ROMANCE-IMAGN IMAGES

3RD TEAM

OFFENSE

QB	DANTE MOORE OREGON	
RB	LJ MARTIN BYU	
RB	MARK FLETCHER JR. MIAMI (FLA.)	
AP	ANTWAN RAYMOND RUTGERS	
WR	RYAN COLEMAN-WILLIAMS ALABAMA	
WR	AMARE THOMAS HOUSTON	
WR	WYATT YOUNG OKLAHOMA STATE	
TE	TERRANCE CARTER JR. TEXAS TECH	
C	BRUCE MITCHELL BYU	
OL	SHADRE HURST HOUSTON	
OL	JORDAN SEATON LSU	
OL	WENDELL MOE JR. TENNESSEE	
OL	EARNEST GREENE III GEORGIA	

GEOFF BURKE-IMAGN IMAGES

SUNTARINE PERKINS • LB • OLE MISS

DEFENSE

DL	MATAYO UIAGALELEI OREGON	
DL	CLEV LUBIN LOUISVILLE	
DL	TAYLOR WEIN OKLAHOMA	
DL	PRINCEWILL UMANMIELEN LSU	
LB	SAMMY BROWN CLEMSON	
LB	KYNGSTONN VILIAMU-ASA NOTRE DAME	
LB	BEN ROBERTS TEXAS TECH	
LB	SUNTARINE PERKINS OLE MISS	
CB	BRANDON FINNEY JR. OREGON	
CB	DJ PICKETT LSU	
S	KEON SABB ALABAMA	
S	KOI PERICH OREGON	

SPECIALISTS

K	AIDAN BIRR GEORGIA TECH	
P	GRAYSON MILLER OKLAHOMA	
KR	RAYSHAWN PLEASANT AUBURN	
PR	MALACHI TONEY MIAMI (FLA.)	

26TH ANNUAL
UNIT RANKINGS

ACC

	QB	RB	WR	OL	DL	LB	DB
Boston College	16	14	16	17	17	17	16
Cal	4	12	5	12	15	16	13
Clemson	9	6	2	6	2	2	3
Duke	15	5	10	11	14	14	15
Florida State	12	4	3	10	7	7	8
Georgia Tech	13	3	13	4	12	8	14
Louisville	8	2	7	5	4	1	2
Miami (Fla.)	1	1	1	1	1	3	1
North Carolina	14	13	15	15	8	15	12
NC State	3	8	9	8	11	13	10
Pitt	6	11	11	7	3	6	5
SMU	2	11	4	2	9	4	9
Stanford	17	15	17	14	16	9	17
Syracuse	7	17	14	13	13	12	11
Virginia	10	7	8	3	6	5	4
Virginia Tech	5	10	6	9	10	11	6
Wake Forest	11	16	12	16	5	10	7

AMERICAN

	QB	RB	WR	OL	DL	LB	DB
Army	2	11	12	1	3	9	8
Charlotte	13	14	11	14	14	11	13
East Carolina	7	4	4	7	5	5	4
Florida Atlantic	3	13	2	9	9	8	9
Memphis	5	10	6	6	1	1	1
Navy	4	12	13	2	7	2	6
North Texas	11	3	7	11	11	12	11
Rice	14	9	14	13	12	14	12
South Florida	6	7	3	3	2	3	3
Temple	12	8	5	4	10	6	10
Tulane	9	1	8	8	4	4	2
Tulsa	8	6	9	12	8	10	5
UAB	10	5	10	10	13	13	14
UTSA	1	2	1	5	6	7	7

MALACHI TONEY • WR • MIAMI (FLA.)

DAVID AMADOR II • WR • UTSA

FROM TOP: MARK J. REBILAS-IMAGN IMAGES; DANNY WILD-IMAGN IMAGES

BIG 12

	QB	RB	WR	OL	DL	LB	DB
Arizona	1	11	7	7	7	4	9
Arizona State	12	9	3	10	6	6	10
Baylor	7	7	12	13	14	13	11
BYU	4	3	10	3	2	2	2
Cincinnati	15	14	14	1	13	11	14
Colorado	11	16	5	16	16	16	15
Houston	5	6	4	4	5	3	3
Iowa State	13	15	15	15	10	9	12
Kansas	16	10	11	8	8	7	8
Kansas State	6	8	6	9	9	8	6
Oklahoma State	2	2	2	11	11	12	13
TCU	9	12	8	5	3	10	7
Texas Tech	8	1	1	2	1	1	1
UCF	10	13	13	14	15	15	5
Utah	3	4	9	6	4	5	4
West Virginia	14	5	16	12	12	14	16

A.J. HOLMES JR. • DL • TEXAS TECH

BIG TEN

	QB	RB	WR	OL	DL	LB	DB
Illinois	10	10	10	10	13	14	11
Indiana	3	4	3	1	2	1	3
Iowa	16	9	16	5	9	9	6
Maryland	9	17	15	13	11	7	12
Michigan	6	3	5	4	4	10	4
Michigan State	15	16	17	17	17	15	16
Minnesota	11	8	12	11	6	12	13
Nebraska	12	15	8	6	10	11	8
Northwestern	14	11	14	16	12	13	10
Ohio State	2	1	1	2	3	3	2
Oregon	1	2	2	3	1	2	1
Penn State	7	7	6	9	7	4	5
Purdue	18	18	18	18	18	18	18
Rutgers	17	6	9	15	16	16	17
UCLA	8	13	11	12	15	17	14
USC	4	5	4	7	5	8	7
Washington	5	12	7	8	8	5	9
Wisconsin	13	14	13	14	14	6	15

DANTE MOORE • QB • OREGON

FROM TOP: MARK J. REBILAS-IMAGN IMAGES; VINCENT CARCHIETTA-IMAGN IMAGES

CUSA

	QB	RB	WR	OL	DL	LB	DB
Delaware	1	2	1	2	5	3	5
FIU	7	5	4	6	6	6	3
Jacksonville State	3	8	7	3	1	1	1
Kennesaw State	6	3	5	5	3	2	4
Liberty	4	1	3	1	2	4	6
Middle Tennessee	5	9	10	8	8	9	8
Missouri State	9	7	6	9	9	8	9
New Mexico State	8	10	8	7	7	5	7
Sam Houston	10	6	9	10	10	10	10
WKU	2	4	2	4	4	7	2

MAC

	QB	RB	WR	OL	DL	LB	DB
Akron	5	4	3	6	6	12	9
Ball State	13	12	13	7	13	13	12
Bowling Green	8	6	11	11	7	6	7
Buffalo	12	10	9	10	8	7	3
Central Michigan	10	5	7	3	5	10	6
Eastern Michigan	3	8	2	5	9	8	5
Kent State	4	11	6	8	10	11	10
Miami (Ohio)	9	3	4	1	1	1	2
Ohio	7	7	8	9	4	3	8
Sacramento State	6	9	10	13	11	9	13
Toledo	2	2	1	4	3	2	4
UMass	11	13	12	12	12	4	11
Western Michigan	1	1	5	2	2	5	1

MWC

	QB	RB	WR	OL	DL	LB	DB
Air Force	2	3	10	6	7	2	5
Hawai'i	1	10	1	7	6	6	7
Nevada	7	7	6	4	5	5	6
New Mexico	4	2	3	3	2	1	1
North Dakota St.	5	5	5	1	1	3	2
Northern Illinois	10	6	8	9	10	10	10
San José State	9	9	4	8	9	9	9
UNLV	3	1	2	2	3	4	4
UTEP	8	8	7	10	8	8	8
Wyoming	6	4	9	5	4	7	3

SEAN WILSON • WR • DELAWARE

ANDREW LOWRY • OL • MIAMI (OHIO)

MERCURY SWAIM • LB • TAVIAN COMBS • S • NEW MEXICO

FROM TOP: WILLIAM BRETZGER-DELAWARE NEWS J; MARK J. REBILAS-IMAGN IMAGES (2)

PAC-12

	QB	RB	WR	OL	DL	LB	DB
Boise State	1	1	2	1	1	1	1
Colorado State	7	4	8	8	8	7	8
Fresno State	8	3	5	2	2	3	2
Oregon State	4	7	7	6	7	5	7
San Diego State	3	2	4	3	3	2	3
Texas State	2	5	1	7	6	6	5
Utah State	6	6	6	4	4	4	4
Washington State	5	8	3	5	5	8	6

SEC

	QB	RB	WR	OL	DL	LB	DB
Alabama	9	14	4	12	8	8	2
Arkansas	16	15	13	11	16	16	16
Auburn	5	9	12	14	12	7	13
Florida	12	5	3	9	9	11	9
Georgia	3	2	9	1	3	1	1
Kentucky	14	16	16	10	13	15	15
LSU	4	6	7	7	5	2	4
Miss. State	11	10	14	16	15	14	11
Missouri	10	1	10	6	11	9	12
Oklahoma	8	11	5	4	2	3	3
Ole Miss	2	3	8	8	6	6	8
South Carolina	6	13	11	13	10	12	10
Tennessee	13	7	6	3	7	5	7
Texas	1	4	1	2	1	4	6
Texas A&M	7	8	2	5	4	10	5
Vanderbilt	15	12	15	15	14	13	14

SUN BELT

	QB	RB	WR	OL	DL	LB	DB
Appalachian State	11	5	7	9	10	5	10
Arkansas State	10	2	3	4	8	10	3
Coastal Carolina	12	11	8	14	13	7	7
Georgia Southern	4	8	1	8	4	4	4
Georgia State	7	14	11	7	14	14	14
James Madison	3	1	2	2	2	3	2
Louisiana	9	9	10	1	5	12	11
Louisiana Tech	5	13	13	5	3	1	8
Marshall	2	6	4	3	9	6	6
Old Dominion	6	3	6	11	1	2	1
South Alabama	8	4	9	10	7	8	9
Southern Miss	13	10	12	12	11	13	12
Troy	1	7	5	6	6	11	5
ULM	14	12	14	13	12	9	13

NATIONAL UNIT RANKINGS

QUARTERBACKS

1. Texas
2. Oregon
3. Ohio State
4. Notre Dame
5. Ole Miss
6. Miami (Fla.)
7. Georgia
8. Indiana
9. USC
10. LSU

RUNNING BACKS

1. Missouri
2. Georgia
3. Ole Miss
4. Miami (Fla.)
5. Louisville
6. Texas
7. Texas Tech
8. Ohio State
9. Oregon
10. Michigan

WIDE RECEIVERS

1. Ohio State
2. Texas
3. Miami (Fla.)
4. Oregon
5. Indiana
6. Clemson
7. Texas A&M
8. Texas Tech
9. Notre Dame
10. Florida

OFFENSIVE LINE

1. Notre Dame
2. Georgia
3. Indiana
4. Ohio State
5. Texas
6. Oregon
7. Michigan
8. Iowa
9. Tennessee
10. Cincinnati

DEFENSIVE LINE

1. Oregon
2. Notre Dame
3. Miami (Fla.)
4. Indiana
5. Texas
6. Oklahoma
7. Ohio State
8. Georgia
9. Michigan
10. Texas Tech

LINEBACKERS

1. Georgia
2. Notre Dame
3. Indiana
4. LSU
5. Oregon
6. Oklahoma
7. Texas
8. Texas Tech
9. Tennessee
10. BYU

DEFENSIVE BACKS

1. Notre Dame
2. Oregon
3. Miami (Fla.)
4. Ohio State
5. Indiana
6. Georgia
7. Alabama
8. Oklahoma
9. LSU
10. Michigan

INSIDE saturday

HEISMAN WATCH

BY KYLE WOOD

TIER 1

ARCH MANNING
QB • TEXAS

Manning (right) may not have lived up to the Heisman hype heaped on him last season, but don't discount what he did in Year 1 as the Longhorns' starter. He quite literally found his legs down the stretch, ending the season by showcasing the best of his dual-threat abilities. Manning will benefit from throwing to the best wide receiver room in the country. And with Steve Sarkisian scheming him up, his stats could explode.

CJ CARR
QB • NOTRE DAME

The moment was never too big for Carr as a freshman. And with all-world running back Jeremiyah Love gone, the Fighting Irish will rely on Carr's arm much more often this season.

TRINIDAD CHAMBLISS
QB • OLE MISS

Chambliss won an eligibility battle to extend a unique career that saw him dominate both Division II and the SEC. His stats, once he took over for the Rebels, were otherworldly. Though Chambliss will be in a new system with fresh faces, the smart money is on him dazzling once again.

TIER 1, CONT.

JULIAN SAYIN QB • OHIO STATE

Sayin earned an invite to New York for his uber-efficient Buckeyes debut. With Arthur Smith calling the plays and Jeremiah Smith still lined up outside, he could take his play up another level and bring home the hardware.

JOSH HOOVER QB • INDIANA

Curt Cignetti has established himself as a quarterback kingmaker. And Hoover — who threw for a ton of yards, touchdowns and interceptions at TCU — is next up. Doubt Hoover and the Hoosiers at your own peril.

DARIAN MENSAH QB • MIAMI (FLA.)

If you have any questions about Mensah's ability, consider how hard the Hurricanes went after him — and how hard Duke fought to keep him. Miami is in the business of transfer portal quarterbacks. And based on Mensah's production, it looks like the Canes got another good one.

DANTE MOORE QB • OREGON

Moore opted to wait on the NFL and return for another season in college after establishing himself as one of the best players in the country. He has the talent — and the weapons in place around him — to become the Ducks' second Heisman winner.

JEREMIAH SMITH WR • OHIO STATE

Smith is widely considered the best player in college football. After two Biletnikoff Award snubs and no real Heisman consideration, don't be surprised if this is the year he goes scorched earth.

OPPOSITE: DALE ZANINE-IMAGN IMAGES; TOP: JEROME MIRON-IMAGN IMAGES

TIER 2

BEAR BACHMEIER QB, BYU

Bachmeier accounted for 3,560 yards of total offense and 26 total touchdowns, becoming only the second freshman quarterback in BYU's storied history at the position to throw for 3,000-plus yards (3,033).

SAM LEAVITT QB, LSU

Leavitt was the biggest get out of the portal for Lane Kiffin's first Tigers team. Assuming good health, there will be offensive fireworks in Baton Rouge.

JAYDEN MAIAVA QB, USC

No program has collected more Heismans than the Trojans. And Lincoln Riley is responsible for a few wins as well. If Maiava has truly mastered this offense, eye-popping stats are sure to follow.

JOHN MATEER QB, OKLAHOMA

It looked like the Heisman was Mateer's award to win last season before he underwent surgery and Fernando Mendoza took off. Mateer must recapture that September magic to be in the mix.

MARCEL REED QB, TEXAS A&M

If Reed takes another leap as a passer and maintains his mobility, the Aggies should be successful enough to keep him in contention.

GUNNER STOCKTON QB, GEORGIA

Stockton is the definition of solid, and his Bulldogs might just reassert themselves as the best team in the country when it's all said and done.

DON'T FORGET ABOUT

- **Rocco Becht • QB, Penn State** Becht has ample starting experience and rare familiarity with his new Nittany Lions teammates.
- **Kewan Lacy • RB, Ole Miss** A touchdown machine, Lacy returns to the Rebels ready for an even larger workload.
- **Austin Mack/Keelon Russell • QB, Alabama** The winner of the Crimson Tide quarterback battle could put up big numbers in this system.
- **LaNorris Sellers • QB, South Carolina** Sellers struggled last season — but at his best, he possesses a rare combination of size and speed.
- **Malachi Toney • WR, Miami (Fla.)** Toney set records as a true freshman. The sky is the limit for a player with that kind of speed.
- **Bryce Underwood • QB, Michigan** Underwood showed flashes of brilliance as a true freshman, and he might be ready to take a major leap in 2026.
- **Demond Williams Jr. • QB, Washington** He flirted with the transfer portal, but it turns out that Williams is sticking around. Can the Huskies maximize his unique abilities?

LONGSHOTS

Byrum Brown • QB, Auburn | Cam Coleman • WR, Texas | Devon Dampier • QB, Utah | Mark Fletcher Jr. • RB, Miami (Fla.) | Ahmad Hardy • RB, Missouri | Bo Jackson • RB, Ohio State | Avery Johnson • QB, Kansas State Drew Mestemaker • QB, Oklahoma State | Aaron Philo • QB, Florida Jaron-Keawe Sagapolutele • QB, Cal | Conner Weigman • QB, Houston

10 BEST GAMES OF 2026

BY KYLE WOOD

1 OHIO STATE AT TEXAS (SEPT. 12)

You might recall that the Longhorns' trip to the Horseshoe last season also took the top spot. The Buckeyes won a slugfest, which didn't do anything to dampen expectations for the return trip. Both teams once again have title aspirations, with Heisman favorites Arch Manning and Julian Sayin at the forefront. And now, Manning has Cam Coleman to counter Sayin's connection with Jeremiah Smith. Can Ohio State make it three in a row? Or will Texas stop the skid at home?

2. OHIO STATE AT INDIANA (OCT. 17)

The Hoosiers turned the tide of a series that the Buckeyes have long dominated. Indiana's first win over Ohio State in decades was a key checkpoint on its path to an undefeated season and first national title. Indiana head coach Curt Cignetti's success seems sustainable. And the arrival of another loaded transfer class could help the Hoosiers maintain their perch atop the Big Ten — but not if Ryan Day and Co. have something to say about it.

3. MIAMI (FLA.) AT NOTRE DAME (NOV. 7)

Much has been made of last season's meeting between the Hurricanes and Fighting Irish. Miami's win propelled it to the College Football Playoff for the first time and kept Notre Dame out, much to the chagrin of some folks in South Bend. After all that talk, quarterback CJ Carr and the Irish have a shot at revenge when the Canes come to town with transfer quarterback Darian Mensah leading the charge.

4. LSU AT OLE MISS (SEPT. 19)

The Tigers and Rebels already didn't like each other, and Lane Kiffin's unceremonious exit for LSU from the best team in Ole Miss history ratcheted the rivalry up a few notches ahead of his return. Lost in the fracas is the fact that this should be a very good game between the lines, in addition to all the storylines. This is about as high stakes as a Saturday in September gets.

5. MICHIGAN AT OHIO STATE (NOV. 28)

The Buckeyes ended their losing streak in the series with a resounding win in '25, setting the stage for Ohio State to take back control of this epic rivalry. However, the arrival of new Michigan head coach Kyle Whittingham and the development of quarterback Bryce Underwood throw an interesting wrinkle into the 122nd iteration of The Game.

6. OREGON AT OHIO STATE (NOV. 7)

Quarterback Dante Moore's return keeps the Ducks on par with the Buckeyes. There's a fair chance this trip to the Horseshoe is the only game all season in which Oregon will be an underdog, and it could have an outsized impact on the Big Ten race and CFP seeding.

7. GEORGIA AT OLE MISS (NOV. 7)

The Rebels are the only SEC team not named Alabama to beat the Bulldogs since 2021. That includes Ole Miss' epic CFP win on New Year's Day 2026. Head coaches Kirby Smart and Pete Golding bring back the bulk of their rosters from that Sugar Bowl classic.

8. TEXAS AT TEXAS A&M (NOV. 27)

Even beyond the potential SEC and CFP implications — which are massive — the Aggies need a win just to regain bragging rights. Texas A&M hasn't beaten the Longhorns since 2010 (although the teams have met only three times since then).

9. GEORGIA AT ALABAMA (OCT. 10)

The Bulldogs had struggled against the Crimson Tide — that is, until Georgia blew out Bama in last season's SEC Championship Game, a stark reminder that the league still runs through Athens. But for all of the Dawgs' success, they haven't won in Tuscaloosa since 2007.

10. TEXAS VS. OKLAHOMA (OCT. 10)

Steve Sarkisian has had Brent Venables' number as long as they've been at their respective schools. However, OU weathered a lopsided loss in the Red River Rivalry a season ago to return to the CFP, while Texas stayed home. Neither team can afford a loss this season.

FROM TOP: ADAM CAIRNS - IMAGN IMAGES; GRACE SMITH/INDYSTAR

TOP TRANSFERS

BY STEVEN LASSAN

QB DREW MESTEMAKER
OKLAHOMA STATE FROM NORTH TEXAS

Mestemaker threw for 4,379 yards and 34 touchdowns in a breakout season at North Texas in '25. By following head coach Eric Morris to Oklahoma State, Mestemaker should make a seamless transition and be one of the Big 12's top quarterbacks this fall.

QB DARIAN MENSAH
MIAMIA (FLA.) FROM DUKE

Mensah's late entry into the portal solved Miami's biggest question mark. He threw for 3,973 yards and 34 touchdowns in leading Duke to an ACC championship last season.

FROM TOP: NATHAN J. FISH/THE OKLAHOMAN; JAYLYNN NASH-IMAGN IMAGES

QB JACKSON ARNOLD
UNLV from Auburn

The former 5-star aims to get his career back on track in head coach Dan Mullen's high-powered offense after struggling in previous stops at Oklahoma and Auburn.

QB ALONZA BARNETT III
UCF from James Madison

Barnett's mobility should help jumpstart a UCF offense that ranked 13th in the Big 12 in scoring.

QB ROCCO BECHT
Penn State from Iowa State

After throwing for 9,000-plus yards at Iowa State, Becht followed head coach Matt Campbell to Penn State.

QB CUTTER BOLEY
Arizona State from Kentucky

Boley threw for 2,160 yards and 15 touchdowns in a promising redshirt freshman performance for a struggling Kentucky offense last season.

QB BYRUM BROWN
Auburn from South Florida

Brown led the nation in total offense last season (347.2 ypg) and should have a seamless transition to the SEC after following head coach Alex Golesh to the Plains.

QB AIDAN CHILES
Northwestern from Michigan St.

Northwestern marks Chiles' third stop after previous stints at Oregon State and Michigan State. Chiles lost the starting job in East Lansing, but a chance to work under new offensive coordinator Chip Kelly in Evanston should get his career back on track.

QB ANTHONY COLANDREA
Nebraska from UNLV

The combination of Colandrea's playmaking ability and offensive coordinator Dana Holgorsen's scheme should make for an intriguing pairing.

QB ASHTON DANIELS
Florida State from Auburn

Daniels struggled in a previous stint at Stanford but averaged 321.7 total yards per game in three starts at Auburn last November.

QB WALKER EGET
Duke from San José State

Eget provides Duke with an experienced option after Darian Mensah's late decision to transfer to Miami (Fla.).

QB BILLY EDWARDS JR.
North Carolina from Wisconsin

Head coach Bill Belichick hopes the combination of Edwards and new play-caller Bobby Petrino brings life to an offense that averaged only 19.3 points per game in '25.

QB JC FRENCH IV
Cincinnati from Georgia Southern

French threw for nearly 6,000 yards across 36 games at Georgia Southern.

QB JADEN CRAIG
TCU from Harvard

Craig replaces Josh Hoover at the controls of TCU's high-powered offense. The FCS Harvard transfer was a finalist for the Walter Payton Award after throwing for 2,869 yards and 25 touchdowns last year.

QB ETHAN GRUNKEMEYER
Virginia Tech from Penn State

Grunkemeyer was pressed into action after an early-season injury to starter Drew Allar at Penn State last year. Grunkemeyer finished on a high note by throwing seven touchdowns over his final five games. Following head coach James Franklin to Blacksburg should ensure an easy transition.

QB MICHAEL HAWKINS JR.
West Virginia from Oklahoma

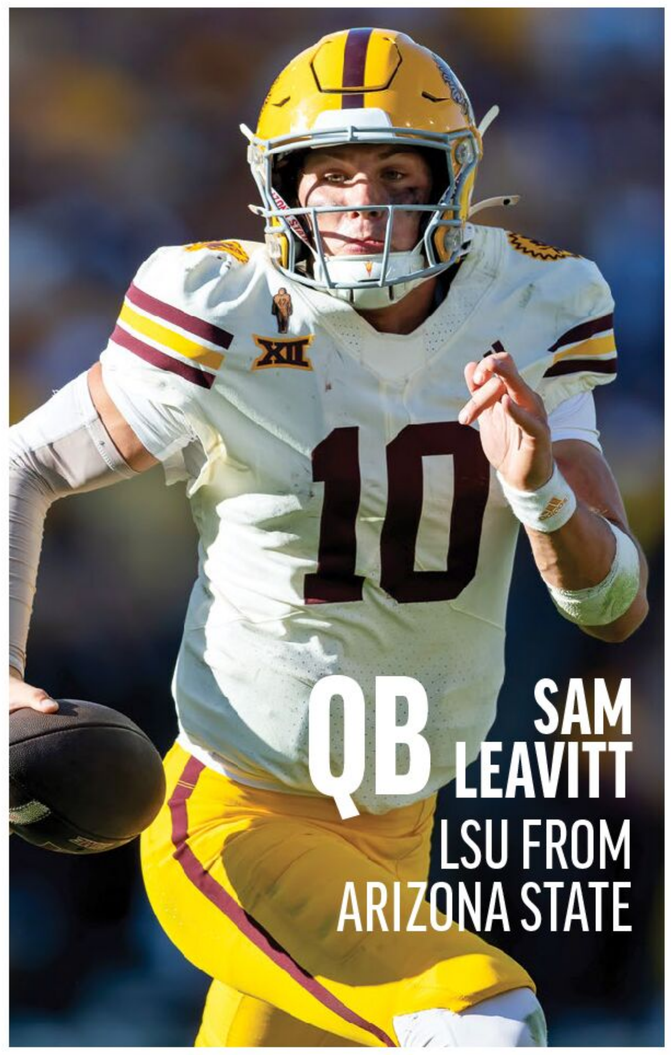
Hawkins possesses the rushing ability and athleticism to thrive in head coach Rich Rodriguez's offense.

QB KATIN HOUSER
Illinois from East Carolina

Houser ranked third in the American Conference in passing yards per game (275) and hit six completions of 50-plus yards last season.

TOP TRANSFERS, CONT.

Hoover has big shoes to fill, replacing Heisman Trophy winner Fernando Mendoza. However, the TCU transfer is up to the task after throwing for 9,629 yards and 71 touchdowns across 36 games with the Horned Frogs. The Texas native should be an excellent fit in head coach Curt Cignetti's offense.



Leavitt's recovery from a season-ending foot injury at Arizona State is one of the top SEC storylines entering '26. If he's healthy, Leavitt's mix of arm talent and mobility, along with head coach Lane Kiffin's offense, should propel the junior to a spot among the top quarterbacks in college football.

QB COLTON JOSEPH
Wisconsin from Old Dominion

Joseph was one of the nation's most dynamic signal-callers last season, averaging 302.6 total yards per game in 12 starts. The Badgers hope he's the key cog in turning around an offense that averaged only 12.8 points per game in '25.

QB LINCOLN KIENHOLZ
Louisville from Ohio State

Kienholz has limited experience (36 career pass attempts), but head coach Jeff Brohm is intrigued by the former 4-star prospect's upside.

QB DJ LAGWAY
Baylor from Florida

Talent isn't a question with Lagway. However, his play declined in '25 due to injuries, and he's tossed 23 interceptions over the past two years. A fresh start could help Lagway get his career back on track.

QB HUSAN LONGSTREET
LSU from USC

Longstreet — a 5-star prospect in the '25 signing class — joins LSU after one season at USC. He could be a valuable insurance policy if Sam Leavitt's foot injury is a concern.

QB GIO LOPEZ
Wake Forest from North Carolina

After a disappointing year at North Carolina, Lopez is poised to rebound at Wake Forest with his former South Alabama offensive coordinator (Rob Ezell) calling the plays in Winston-Salem.

QB ALBERTO MENDOZA
Georgia Tech from Indiana

Alberto — the brother of former Indiana star Fernando Mendoza — impressed in limited snaps with the Hoosiers and has a clear path to the starting job at Georgia Tech.

QB KENNY MINCHEY
Kentucky from Notre Dame

Minchey now gets to work with one of college football's top offensive minds in new Kentucky head coach Will Stein.

QB AARON PHILO
Florida from Georgia Tech

Tramell Jones Jr. pushed for the No. 1 job in the spring, but Philo's familiarity with new offensive coordinator Buster Faulkner is a huge asset.

QB BEAU PRIBULA
Virginia from Missouri

Pribula has the inside track to replace Chandler Morris after accounting for 17 total touchdowns in 10 games at Missouri last year.

QB DYLAN RAIOLA
Oregon from Nebraska

Raiola is taking a different path than most transfers. Instead of transferring for a No. 1 job, the two-year starter at Nebraska went to Oregon to sit behind Dante Moore and develop in anticipation of '27.

QB JAYLEN RAYNOR
Iowa State from Arkansas State

Raynor accumulated nearly 10,000 yards of total offense in three years at Arkansas State. He's a key cog in a rebuilt Iowa State offense.

QB AUSTIN SIMMONS
Missouri from Ole Miss

Simmons has all of the tools to develop into a high-level SEC starter. Can Missouri get the most out of his talent?

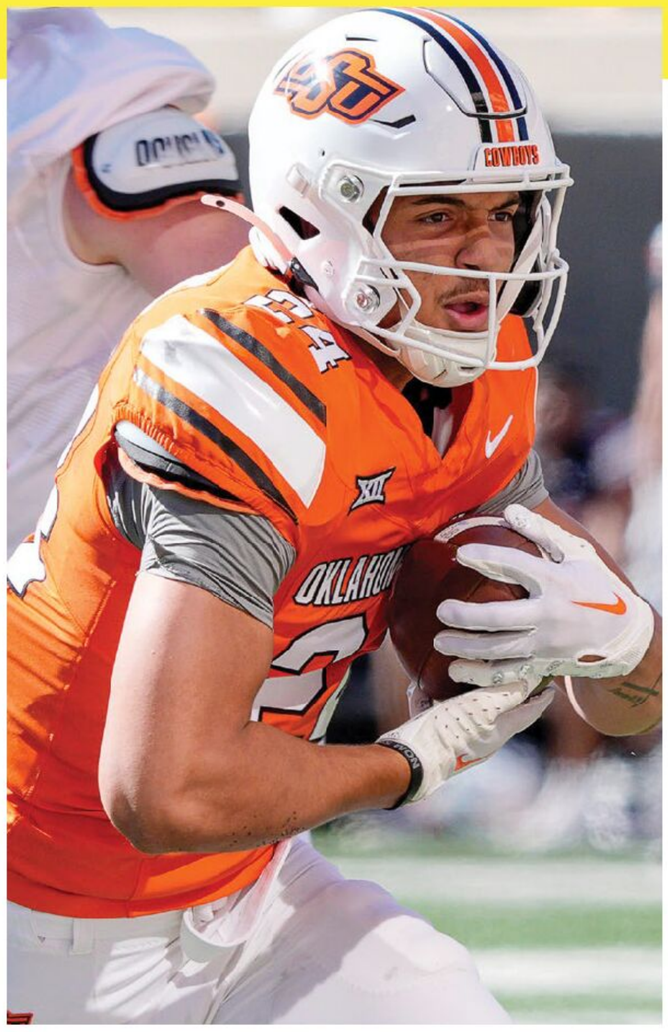
QB BRENDAN SORSBY
Texas Tech from Cincinnati

Sorsby has all of the tools, but a gambling investigation might prevent him from seeing the field this season.

QB MICHAEL VAN BUREN JR.
South Florida from LSU

After stints at LSU and Mississippi State, Van Buren has the potential to emerge as one of the American's top quarterbacks in South Florida's spread attack.

FROM LEFT: RICH JANZARUK/HERALD-TIMES; MARK J. REBILAS-IMAGN IMAGES



WR CAM COLEMAN
TEXAS FROM AUBURN

Coleman's elite physical talent and big-play ability should shine at Texas after two years of inconsistent quarterback play at Auburn.

RB CALEB HAWKINS
OKLAHOMA STATE FROM NORTH TEXAS

Hawkins followed head coach Eric Morris to Oklahoma State after rushing for 1,434 yards and 25 touchdowns at North Texas in '25.

RB CAM COOK
West Virginia from Jacksonville State
Cook led all FBS players with 1,659 rushing yards last season and lands in one of the most running back-friendly offenses in the nation.

RB JUSTICE HAYNES
Georgia Tech from Michigan
Haynes is set to team with Malachi Hosley to form one of the ACC's top backfields.

RB MAKHI HUGHES
Houston from Oregon
Hughes had back-to-back 1,000-yard seasons at Tulane in 2023-24. He tallied only 17 carries with Oregon but is poised to handle the bulk of the carries for Houston.

RB HOLLYWOOD SMOTHERS
Texas from NC State
Smothers and fellow transfer Raleek Brown (Arizona State) are set to anchor an improved Longhorn ground game.

WR MYLAN GRAHAM
Notre Dame from Ohio State
The arrival of Graham and fellow Ohio State transfer Quincy Porter adds more weapons to a loaded Fighting Irish offense for quarterback CJ Carr.

WR NICK MARSH
Indiana from Michigan State
Marsh accumulated 1,311 receiving yards in two seasons. His arrival alleviates concern over key departures at receiver for Curt Cignetti.

OL LANCE HEARD
Kentucky from Tennessee
Heard's arrival gives new quarterback Kenny Minchey a reliable blindside protector and is a key piece in Kentucky's hopes to rebuild the "Big Blue Wall."

OL JACARRIUS PEAK
South Carolina from NC State
A spring injury may sideline Peak early in the '26 season. The 32-game starter at NC State is expected to anchor a rebuilt and improved South Carolina line.

OL JORDAN SEATON
LSU from Colorado
Seaton played right away as a true freshman at Colorado and shined over 22 starts. He's a key cog in a rebuilt LSU offensive line.

DL CHAZ COLEMAN
Tennessee from Penn State
Coleman followed defensive coordinator Jim Knowles from Happy Valley to Rocky Top. He's just scratching the surface of his potential.

DL JOHN HENRY DALEY
Michigan from Utah
Daley (11.5 sacks last year) is on track for a full recovery after a torn Achilles ended his '25 season.

DL JAMES SMITH
Ohio State from Alabama
Smith and Qua Russaw are instant-impact contributors from Alabama on an Ohio State defensive line replacing three key starters.

DL PRINCEWILL UMANMIELEN
LSU from Ole Miss
After a breakout '25 season, Umanmielen followed Lane Kiffin to Baton Rouge. The senior is one of the SEC's top returning pass-rushers.

DL TREY WHITE
Texas Tech from San Diego State
White headlines eight Red Raider transfer additions to the defensive line. He has accumulated 19.5 sacks over the past two years.

DL DAMON WILSON II
Miami (Fla.) from Missouri
Wilson's ability to get to the QB (nine sacks in '25) helps compensate for the loss of Rueben Bain Jr. and Akheem Mesidor to the NFL.

LB RASHEEM BILES
Texas from Pitt
Biles projects as the top transfer linebacker after back-to-back All-ACC seasons and 32 tackles for a loss during that span at Pitt.

DB TY BENEFIELD
LSU from Boise State
Benefield's versatility in defending the run and pass will be a huge asset for a rebuilt LSU secondary.

DB KOI PERICH
Oregon from Minnesota
Perich should be a seamless replacement for All-America safety Dillon Thieneman on the back end.

FROM LEFT: BRYAN TERRY/THE OKLAHOMAN; JAKE CRANDALL/ ADVERTISER

GRADING 2026'S NEW HEAD COACHES

BY STEVEN LASSAN

1 LANE KIFFIN LSU

Kiffin has navigated the new transfer portal and NIL rules as well as any coach in college football. After going 55-19 at Ole Miss with three consecutive seasons of double-digit victories, Kiffin was brought to Baton Rouge with one goal in mind: a national championship. The Bayou Bengals are sparing no expense on the talent acquisition front, and Kiffin should have no trouble keeping Louisiana's top recruits at home. **GRADE: A+**

2 KYLE WHITTINGHAM MICHIGAN

Whittingham wasn't out of a job long following his decision to step down at Utah. The 66-year-old coach brings a needed steady hand to Ann Arbor, while Michigan offers Whittingham an opportunity to chase the only missing pieces on his résumé: a College Football Playoff berth and a national championship. **GRADE: A+**

3 JAMES FRANKLIN VIRGINIA TECH

Franklin was dismissed at Penn State in 2025 after a 3-3 start to a season in which the program expected to contend for a national title. Franklin's struggles in big games are notable, but his ability to win overall at a high level should turn Virginia Tech into an ACC title contender. **GRADE: A**

4. Jon Sumrall, Florida Sumrall won at least nine games in every season as a head coach in stops at Troy (2022-23) and Tulane (2024-25) and compiled a 43-12 record overall. After taking the Green Wave to an appearance in the College Football Playoff last year, Sumrall's next task is to help Florida get back on track on the national level. **GRADE: A**

5. Eric Morris, Oklahoma State North Texas displayed steady improvement under Morris' watch, finishing 12-2 with one of the nation's most prolific offenses in 2025. Morris is bringing a handful of key players from that Mean Green squad, including quarterback Drew Mestemaker and running back Caleb Hawkins. The Cowboys could be the most-improved team in the nation in 2026. **GRADE: A**

6. Matt Campbell, Penn State The Ohio native thrived at one of the toughest power-conference jobs in the nation, recording a 72-55 mark and seven bowl trips at Iowa State. Campbell knows how to get the most out of a roster, but expectations in Happy Valley will be higher than they were in Ames. **GRADE: A**

7. Bob Chesney, UCLA Chesney has won at every level, including a 21-6 mark at James Madison over the past two seasons and a trip to the College Football Playoff in 2025. In stints with the Dukes, Div. III Salve Regina, Div. II Assumption and FCS Holy Cross, Chesney is 132-52 overall as a head coach. **GRADE: A**

8. Charles Huff, Memphis With significant ties to the Southeast and a track record of success as a recruiter and head coach at two different FBS jobs (Southern Miss and Marshall), Huff looks like the right pick to help Memphis challenge for a College Football Playoff spot in the near future. **GRADE: A**

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: MATTHEW HINTON-IMAGN IMAGES; BRIAN BISHOP-IMAGN IMAGES; JUNFU HAN

9. Alex Golesh, Auburn Golesh emerged as one of the top coaches in the Group of 6 ranks, guiding South Florida to a 23-15 record over the past three seasons. Golesh's background of producing prolific offenses should provide instant help on the Plains. The Tigers have not finished higher than ninth in the SEC in scoring over the past six seasons. **GRADE: A**

10 WILL STEIN KENTUCKY

Stein provides a much-needed breath of fresh air after the program had grown stale. The former Louisville quarterback and Kentucky native coordinated some of the nation's top offenses at Oregon over the past three seasons and already put his stamp on the Wildcats with a standout transfer class. **GRADE: A-**

11. Collin Klein, Kansas State Klein is back at his alma mater following a successful two-year stint as Texas A&M's offensive coordinator. This is his first head-coaching opportunity, but the former K-State quarterback knows what it takes to win in Manhattan and is among the top offensive minds in the nation. **GRADE: A-**

12. Jim Mora, Colorado State Mora guided UConn to a 27-23 mark from 2022-25, including back-to-back nine-win campaigns in his final two years in charge. Mora is tasked with helping Colorado State reach its potential, especially as it moves to the Pac-12 this fall. **GRADE: B+**

13. Jimmy Rogers, Iowa State In two seasons in charge at South Dakota State (2023-24), Rogers guided the program to a 27-3 record and won the 2023 FCS National Championship. Rogers was hired at Washington State last season and took a revamped roster to a solid 6-6 season with a bowl appearance. He looks like a strong fit to replace Matt Campbell in Ames. **GRADE: B+**

14. Pete Golding, Ole Miss Golding's tenure is just a few months old, but he's already off to a good start after guiding Ole Miss to two College Football Playoff victories following Lane Kiffin's departure to LSU. Additionally, Golding held on to a couple of key cogs from the 2025 team and brought in one of the SEC's top portal classes to help this program push for a national title. **GRADE: B+**

15 BRIAN HARTLINE SOUTH FLORIDA

Hartline was arguably college football's top wide receivers coach during an eight-year run as an assistant at Ohio State. He was also highly regarded for his work on the recruiting trail — including in the talent-rich state of Florida — which should prove valuable in his new role with the Bulls. **GRADE: B+**

16. Mike Jacobs, Toledo Jacobs is arguably the best under-the-radar hire for '26. He's won at three different jobs at three different levels of college football, compiling a 94-23 mark as a head coach since 2016. Jacobs — a former Ohio State offensive lineman — returns to his home state of Ohio after going 20-6 at Mercer with two FCS Playoff appearances. **GRADE: B+**

17 MORGAN SCALLEY UTAH

Kyle Whittingham leaves big shoes to fill, but Scalley is ready to run his own program. The Salt Lake City native was a standout defensive back for the Utes (2001-04) and has worked as an assistant under Whittingham since 2007. After a promotion to defensive coordinator in 2016, Scalley was instrumental in assembling some of the nation's top units. **GRADE: B**

18. Pat Fitzgerald, Michigan State Fitzgerald returns to a Big Ten sideline for the first time since his dismissal at Northwestern due to hazing allegations surrounding the program. Fitzgerald was later cleared of any wrongdoing. The former Wildcats linebacker went 110-101 overall and posted three seasons of at least 10 victories at his alma mater from 2006-22. **GRADE: B-**

19. Billy Napier, James Madison After a failed stint at Florida, Napier wasted no time in returning to the sidelines at one of the top Group of 6 jobs in the nation. Recruiting top-notch talent to Gainesville was never a problem for Napier, who previously went 40-12 as the head coach at Louisiana from 2018-21. **GRADE: B-**

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: SCOTT UTTERBACK/COURIER JOURNAL; TK; KIRBY LEE-IMAGN IMAGES

GRADING 2026'S NEW HEAD COACHES, CONT.

20. Jason Candle, UConn Candle has been considered a rising star in the Group of 6 coaching ranks, going 81-44 with two MAC titles during his tenure at Toledo. Candle's background on offense, along with his overall success at Toledo, should help UConn build on the program's 18 wins over the past two years. **GRADE: B-**

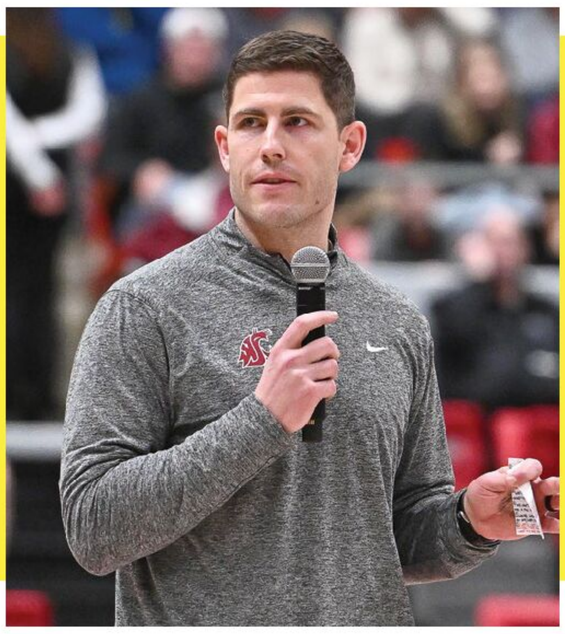
21. Tosh Lupoi, Cal Lupoi's first opportunity as a head coach comes at his alma mater. The former Cal defensive lineman spent the past four years as Oregon's defensive coordinator and previously coached as an assistant at Alabama (2014-18) and in the NFL (2019-21). **GRADE: B-**

22. Mark Carney, Kent State Carney earned the full-time job after guiding Kent State to a 5-7 record as the interim in 2025. This is one of the toughest jobs in college football, but Carney's ability to get the most out of the roster in a challenging situation provides optimism that he can steer this team into annual bowl contention. **GRADE: B-**

23. Blake Anderson, Southern Miss Anderson is a proven winner at the Group of 6 level, but he brings baggage to this role. His last head-coaching stint with Utah State ended after an investigation indicated he did not comply with the school's Title IX policies. **GRADE: B-**

24. Neal Brown, North Texas Brown was considered a rising star after guiding Troy to a 35-16 record from 2015-18. However, that success failed to translate at West Virginia (only one winning season prior to his dismissal in 2024). Brown's ability to reload a roster will be tested right away with an incoming class of 50-plus transfers. **GRADE: B-**

25. Ryan Silverfield, Arkansas Silverfield posted a solid overall 50-25 mark at Memphis, including a 29-9 record over the past three years, and has displayed a knack for successfully building rosters in the transfer portal era. However, this won't be an easy rebuilding project, as Arkansas needs more resources to compete at a high level in the SEC. **GRADE: B-**



26 KIRBY MOORE WASHINGTON STATE

The 35-year-old former Boise State receiver is tasked with bringing some much-needed stability to the program in the new Pac-12. Moore — a native of Washington — arrives in Pullman after working as the offensive coordinator at Missouri since 2023. **GRADE: B-**

27. Ryan Beard, Coastal Carolina Beard is a solid hire for a Coastal Carolina program looking to get back on track after back-to-back losing seasons. The former WKU defensive back went 19-16 at Missouri State and successfully guided the program through a transition from the FCS to the FBS. **GRADE: B-**

28. JaMarcus Shephard, Oregon State Shephard was regarded as one of college football's top wide receiver coaches and has accumulated a wealth of experience as an assistant from stops at WKU, Washington State, Purdue, Washington and Alabama. His energy and passion should bring a much-needed fresh start to Corvallis. **GRADE: B-**

29. Casey Woods, Missouri State Woods lands his first head-coaching job after spending the past four years as SMU's offensive coordinator. The Mustangs averaged 30-plus points per game every year under Woods, who also has previous stops as an assistant at Missouri, UAB, Arkansas State and Auburn. **GRADE: B-**

30. Will Hall, Tulane After back-to-back home-run hires in Willie Fritz and Jon Sumrall, Tulane opted for continuity by promoting Hall. The Mississippi native previously worked with the Green Wave as an assistant from 2019-20 and again in '25. This stop is Hall's fourth chance as a head coach, although his last stop at Southern Miss did not go well (14-30 overall). **GRADE: C+**

31. Tavita Pritchard, Stanford The Washington native played quarterback for the Cardinal from 2006-09 and later worked on the Farm as an assistant coach from 2010-22, including the past five seasons as offensive coordinator. After spending the past three years as the Washington Commanders' quarterback coach, Pritchard returns to Stanford as former teammate Andrew Luck's first hand-picked head coach. **GRADE: C**

32. Alonzo Carter, Sacramento State Carter — a former backup dancer for MC Hammer and longtime assistant coach — is tasked with navigating Sacramento State through its FBS transition. The California native's extensive roots throughout the state should help attract talent to the newest FBS program. Carter spent the past two seasons at Arizona working with the team's running backs. **GRADE: C**

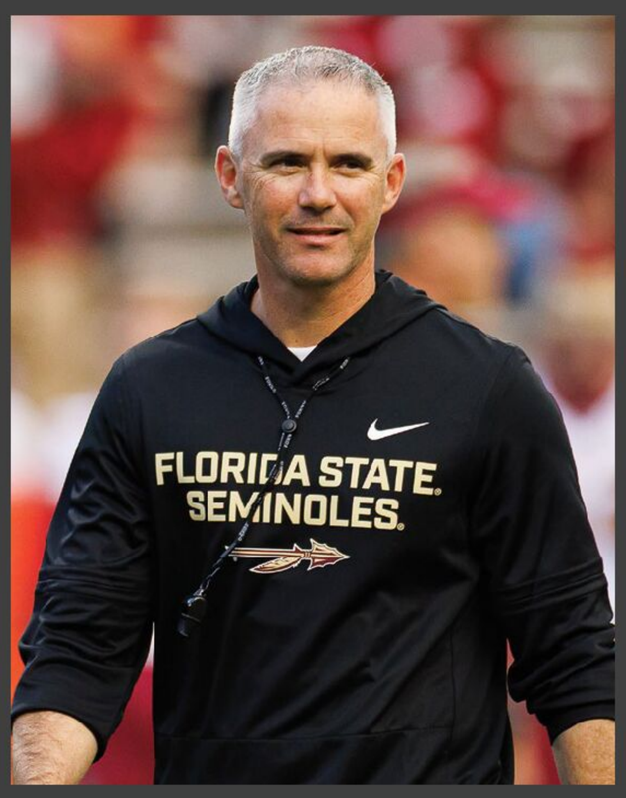
33. John Hauser, Ohio Ohio opted for continuity with Hauser's promotion from defensive coordinator to head coach following Brian Smith's dismissal prior to the team's appearance in the Frisco Bowl. It's hard to argue with that approach considering the Bobcats have made a postseason appearance in nine out of the past 11 years. **GRADE: C**

34. Alex Mortensen, UAB Mortensen had some bright spots as UAB's offensive coordinator over the past three years, but this is a steep learning curve for a first-time head coach at one of college football's toughest jobs. **GRADE: C-**

JAMES SNOOK-IMAGN IMAGES

COACHES ON THE HOT SEAT

BY STEVEN LASSAN



1 MIKE NORVELL, FLORIDA STATE

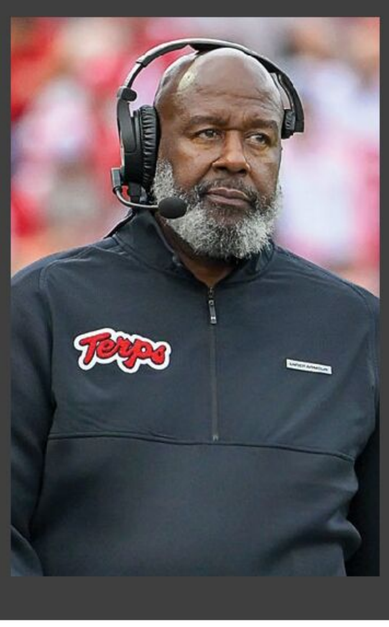
A hefty buyout (more than $50 million) is likely the only thing that saved Norvell from a firing at the end of 2025. After going 23-4 with an ACC title from 2022-23, the Seminoles are just 7-17 overall and 3-13 in ACC play over the past two seasons. Florida State has not won a road game since '23.

2 LUKE FICKELL, WISCONSIN

Fickell's future was the subject of debate after a 4-8 finish last season, which dropped Wisconsin to back-to-back losing marks for the first time since 1991-92. But instead of a coaching change, the Badgers opted to increase their roster investment and provide Fickell with all of the resources to turn around a program that's just 17-21 under his watch.

3. DAVE ARANDA, BAYLOR

Aranda set the bar high with a 12-2 record and Big 12 title in his second season (2021) in Waco. But the Bears have struggled since that breakthrough year, posting losing records in three out of the past four seasons and a 15-21 mark in Big 12 play. Aranda is regarded as one of the top defensive minds in college football, but Baylor has ranked at or near the bottom of the Big 12 in points allowed for three consecutive years.



4. MIKE LOCKSLEY, MARYLAND

Locksley seemed to have Maryland trending in the right direction with three consecutive winning seasons and bowl appearances from 2021-23. But the Terrapins have slid in the wrong direction since that three-year run, finishing 8-16 with just two Big Ten victories since '24. Recruiting talent to College Park hasn't been an issue for Locksley. However, with a 16-43 record in Big Ten play since '19, along with back-to-back losing seasons, the pressure is at an all-time high in College Park.

NORVELL: MATT PENDLETON-IMAGN IMAGES; FICKELL: SAMANTHA MADAR/COLUMBUS DISPATCH; ARANDA: RAYMOND CARLIN III-IMAGN IMAGES; LOCKSLEY: TOMMY GILLIGAN-IMAGN IMAGES

5. Dell McGee, Georgia State
With extensive ties to the Peach State, along with stints as an assistant at Georgia Southern and Georgia, McGee seemed like a slam-dunk hire prior to '24. But the former Auburn defensive back is just 4-20 overall in two seasons and has only one victory (1-15) in Sun Belt action.

6. Derek Mason, Middle Tennessee Mason's hire was met with plenty of optimism in 2024, but the former Vanderbilt head coach has been a massive disappointment. The Blue Raiders are just 6-18 overall and 4-12 in Conference USA action over the past two seasons. Additionally, Mason's background on defense has yet to show on the field, as Middle Tennessee has ranked near the bottom of the conference in points allowed.

7. Shane Beamer, South Carolina South Carolina surged into College Football Playoff contention with a nine-win season in '24, which fueled optimism heading into last year. But largely due to an ineffective offense, the Gamecocks regressed to 4-8 — their worst record under Beamer — with just one victory in SEC play. A revamped offensive staff should help Beamer get South Carolina back on track. But a third losing record in four years could spell the end of his tenure in Columbia.

8. Bill O'Brien, Boston College
After a promising 7-6 debut at Boston College in '24, O'Brien slumped to 2-10 with just one victory in ACC play last year. Six of the Eagles' losses came by 14 points or more, with O'Brien's offense averaging only 20.8 points in ACC games last year.

GETTING WARM

Bill Belichick, North Carolina
Jeff Choate, Nevada
Jeff Lebby, Mississippi State
Lincoln Riley, USC
Scott Satterfield, Cincinnati
Jay Sawvel, Wyoming
Scotty Walden, UTEP

BREAKOUT PLAYERS

BY STEVEN LASSAN

ETHAN GRUNKEMEYER
QB • VIRGINIA TECH

A season-ending injury to Drew Allar pressed Grunkemeyer into action midway through the '25 campaign at Penn State. After a couple of tough learning experiences in road trips to Iowa and Ohio State, Grunkemeyer finished the year on a high note by throwing for 996 yards and seven touchdowns with only one interception over his final five games. The Ohio native followed former Penn State head coach James Franklin to Blacksburg via the portal. If Grunkemeyer picks up where he left off in December, he will rank among the ACC's top signal-callers in '26.

KEELON RUSSELL QB, ALABAMA

Austin Mack and Russell were locked in a tight spring battle to replace Ty Simpson, but Russell may have pulled ahead after an impressive showing in Alabama's final scrimmage. The former No. 2-ranked prospect in the nation flashed big-time talent in limited snaps in '25 and has all the tools.

BRYCE UNDERWOOD QB, MICHIGAN

Underwood started all 13 games as a true freshman last year, throwing for 2,428 yards and 11 touchdowns and adding 392 yards and six scores on the ground. New play-caller Jason Beck should help 2025's top overall recruit reach his potential with a much-improved Michigan attack.

ANEYAS WILLIAMS RB, NOTRE DAME

After waiting patiently behind Jeremiyah Love and Jadarian Price over the past two seasons, Williams is finally poised to handle the bulk of the carries in South Bend. Over the past two years, Williams has averaged 7.6 yards per carry on 58 attempts.

REED HARRIS WR, ARIZONA STATE

Harris transferred to Arizona State after three seasons at Boston College, including a productive '25 that included 39 receptions for 673 yards. The Montana native created buzz all spring for his highlight-reel catches and overall play in his first offseason with the Sun Devils.

TANOOK HINES WR, USC

Hines is expected to be a key weapon for quarterback Jayden Maiava this fall after an impressive freshman campaign. In 13 games, Hines grabbed 34 receptions for 561 yards and two scores, with six catches going for 30-plus yards.

JAMARI JOHNSON TE, OREGON

With Kenyon Sadiq off to the NFL, Johnson will be an even bigger cog in Oregon's passing game after recording 32 catches for 510 yards and three scores in '25.

MICHAEL FASUSI OL, OKLAHOMA

It's never easy starting as a true freshman in the SEC. But that's exactly what Fasusi did last year (10 starts). And now with a full offseason to develop under ace line coach Bill Bedenbaugh, Fasusi is primed to emerge as Oklahoma's anchor at left tackle.

ELIJAH GRIFFIN DL, GEORGIA

Griffin seems poised to join the Georgia DL-to-NFL pipeline in the near future after a freshman season that saw him record 22 tackles and one sack in limited snaps. He is just scratching the surface of his potential.

JUSTIN SCOTT DL, MIAMI (FLA.)

Scott — another former 5-star prospect — looks like the next standout in the trenches for head coach Mario Cristobal. He accumulated 6.5 tackles for a loss over 15 games and played a key role in Miami's stout run defense.

BYRON BALDWIN JR. DB, INDIANA

Baldwin became a key rotational piece as a true freshman in Indiana's standout secondary for the final nine contests. With another offseason to develop, Baldwin should become one of IU's top defenders.

MATTHEW O'HAREN-IMAGN IMAGES

RANKING THE CONFERENCES

BY KYLE WOOD

1. BIG TEN

The past three national champions all hail from the Big Ten. Michigan and Ohio State are traditional powers, and Indiana head coach Curt Cignetti isn't going anywhere. Conventional wisdom would say that Oregon has to break through one of these years. That's a strong contingent, while squads like USC, Iowa, Washington and Illinois make up a respectable second tier. In a conference this bloated, there will be bad teams, but the best of the Big Ten has the edge on the SEC's elite until proven otherwise.

2. SEC

For all the talk of the SEC being left in the dust, it's still home to many of the sport's top programs. Georgia is still the winningest team of this decade. The Texas hype may have just been a year ahead of schedule. And Texas A&M, LSU, Oklahoma, Ole Miss and Alabama all have playoff expectations. The SEC has a deep middle class, and coaching changes at lagging programs such as Florida and Auburn could elevate the conference back to the top spot. The league's national title drought should be over sooner rather than later.

3. BIG 12

Texas Tech — flush with cash and another loaded roster — remains the team to beat. BYU knows all too well that's a tall task. Utah and Houston were also humbled by the conference's new power. Those are the biggest threats to unseat the champs. Arizona and Arizona State can also throw a wrench into the race. Teams under new leadership, such as Kansas State and Oklahoma State, make for an interesting middle of the pack.

RICH JANZARUK/HERALD-TIMES

4. ACC

The ACC is top-heavy with Miami (Fla.) a clear favorite to win the league for the first time. Though there's a drop-off to the next tier of SMU and Louisville, it says a lot that the ceiling of the conference is a trip to the national championship game; that's more than the SEC or Big 12 can say lately. It would do the ACC well if Clemson and Florida State found their footing.

5. PAC-12

Oregon State and Washington State stuck around to see the conference of champions reincarnated. Some of the new faces figure to vault to the top right away. Boise State, Fresno State and San Diego State are all ready to win. Colorado State could soon join that class, too. There's no obvious bottom-feeder in the Pac-12, which is trying a unique schedule format in hopes of producing a playoff team.

6. AMERICAN The American was the only non-power conference untouched by realignment, though it did see more than a third of its coaches turn over. Can it withstand that brain drain and produce another CFP team? Navy is the favorite, while Memphis, South Florida and Tulane, which is coming off a breakthrough playoff berth, are all under new leadership.

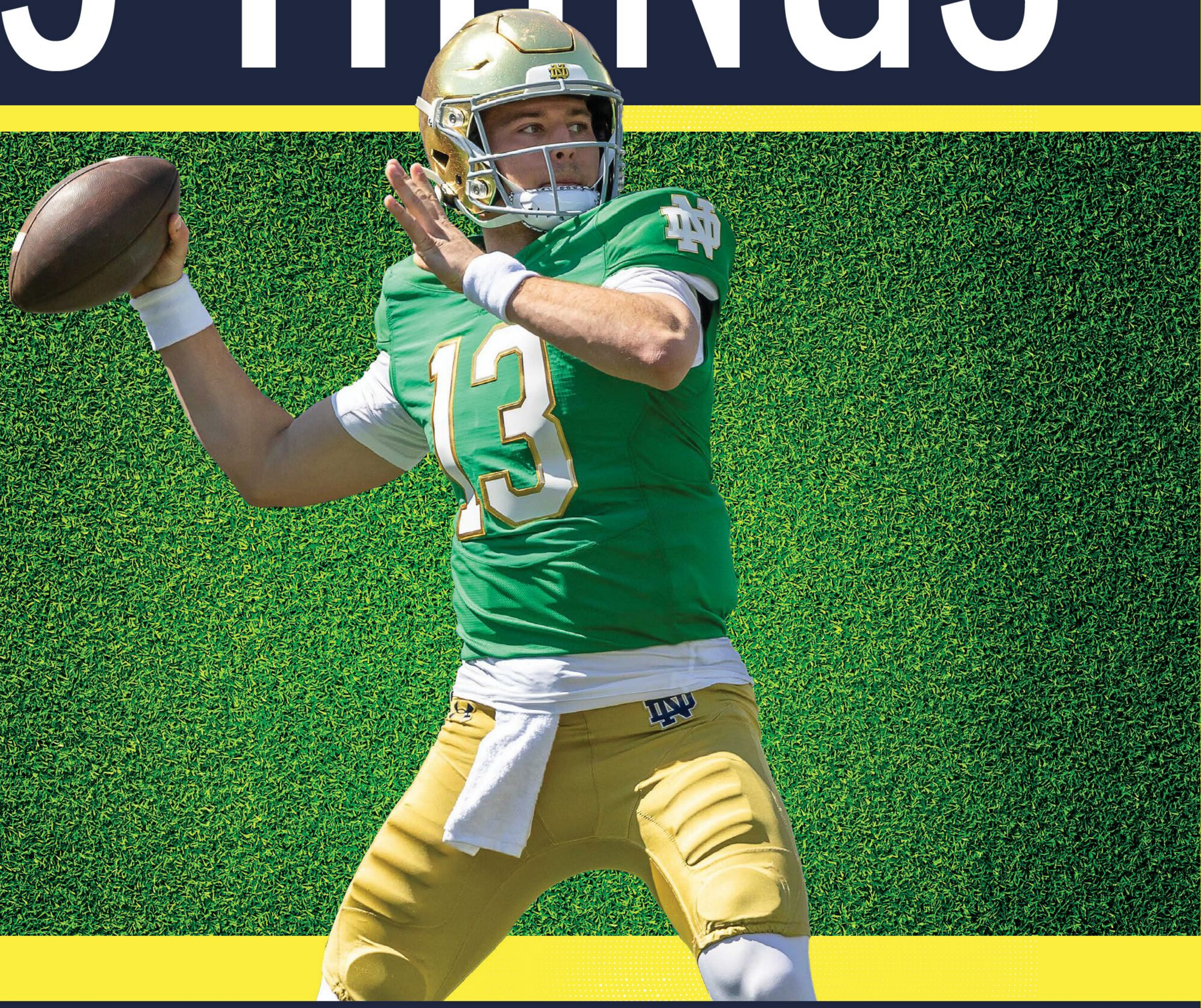
7. MOUNTAIN WEST The Mountain West is almost unrecognizable after the latest round of realignment. San José State is the only active member that has won the league before. Boise State's exit opens the door for perennial runner-up UNLV. The Rebels are among the early CFP contenders in the Group of 6. Hawai'i and New Mexico project to have strong squads once again. Watch out if Air Force can get back on track and FCS powerhouse North Dakota State is ready for the FBS.

8. SUN BELT After the Sun Belt saw James Madison break through to the CFP, power conferences poached several of the league's top quarterbacks and coaches. The Dukes should stay competitive in the East with Georgia Southern and Old Dominion looming. Out West, newcomer Louisiana Tech can challenge Troy.

9. CONFERENCE USA Only half of CUSA was even in the FBS before this decade. Still, there's a solid core, especially if Liberty bounces back. Kennesaw State could have staying power, WKU is always in the mix, Jacksonville State has done nothing but win since its arrival, and Delaware could be ready to contend, too.

10. MAC Fewer than half of the MAC teams reached bowl eligibility last season as the chaotic conference crowned a new champion for the sixth year in a row. There's a top tier of Miami (Ohio), Toledo and reigning champ Western Michigan, but the worst of the MAC brings up the rear of the entire FBS.

15 THINGS



TO WATCH

IN 2026 ⇒ BY STEVEN LASSAN

1 NOTRE DAME'S 2026 REVENGE TOUR

Last year's College Football Playoff snub still stings months later in South Bend. So it's no surprise that Notre Dame opened spring practice with a simple motto: Leave No Doubt.

With 15 starters returning from last year's 10-win squad, along with a favorable schedule, leaving no doubt doesn't just mean a trip to the playoff. Instead, the Fighting Irish clearly have their sights set on ending a national title drought in South Bend that's lasted since 1988.

Quarterback CJ Carr took some early lumps but eventually tied for second nationally in yards per passing attempt (9.4) and threw 24 touchdowns in a standout freshman season. Carr's progression into one of the nation's elite quarterbacks is a big reason why head coach Marcus Freeman's program can win it all. There's no shortage of talent at receiver with Jaden Greathouse and Jordan Faison returning, along with former highly touted prospects Quincy Porter and Mylan Graham arriving from Ohio State via the transfer portal.

Running back Jeremiyah Love will be missed, but Aneyas Williams (7.6 yards per carry over 58 attempts) has flashed in limited time. Outside of replacing Love, Notre Dame's biggest concern is the offensive line. Two starters are gone, and key cogs in center Ashton Craig and tackle Charles Jagusah are on the mend after significant injuries in '25.

Like Carr, the defense took its share of early lumps. Under new coordinator Chris Ash, the Fighting Irish surrendered 98 points in the team's first three contests. This unit showed marked improvement the rest of the way by limiting opponents to 12.6 points per contest over the next nine games and allowing just 4.8 yards per snap for the entire '25 campaign. Notre Dame shouldn't need a transition period on this side of the ball this season, with eight starters back, including All-America cornerback Leonard Moore.

Notre Dame could be favored in 11 or all 12 of its games. The schedule features only three matchups against power-conference opponents — at BYU, Miami (Fla.) and SMU — that had a winning record in '25.

Thanks to a small playoff structure tweak for '26, the Fighting Irish simply need to be in the top 12 of the final ranking to be guaranteed a spot. But with a little extra motivation from last year's snub, a favorable schedule, an experienced two-deep and one of the nation's top quarterbacks in Carr, the goal in '26 isn't just to take a spot in the field. Instead, Freeman's team is set for a national-title-or-bust campaign.

OPPOSITE: MICHAEL CATERINA-IMAGN IMAGES; RIGHT: ADAM CAIRNS/COLUMBUS DISPATCH

2 BIG TEN DOMINANCE SET TO CONTINUE?

Thanks to its success in the BCS era and at the start of the new College Football Playoff format, the SEC held bragging rights over the rest of college football for years. However, things have shifted fast in the sport over the last few seasons. So while it still means more in the SEC, and the conference had arguably more depth than any other league, the Big Ten closed the gap to No. 1 — and it also has a strong case to take the title as the best conference in '26.

The ability to deploy NIL, better head-coaching hires and successful transfer portal usage helped the Big Ten catch the SEC and enter this season with three consecutive national champions.

The Big Ten's era of dominance might not end anytime soon, either. Ohio State, Oregon and Indiana rank among Athlon's top 10 teams for '26, with USC and Michigan expected to push for playoff spots. Head coach Ryan Day's Buckeyes will be eager to avenge an upset loss to Miami (Fla.) in last season's quarterfinals, while Oregon has its sights set on bringing home the program's first national title. Despite some key personnel departures, Indiana isn't going anywhere behind head coach Curt Cignetti.

Kyle Whittingham's messy breakup with Utah was Michigan's gain. The 66-year-old head coach thrived at maximizing talent in Salt Lake City and now inherits nine returning starters, including former 5-star prospect Bryce Underwood at quarterback.

Add in a Penn State team primed for a rebound under new head coach Matt Campbell, a Top 25 Washington squad, another steady season at Iowa from head coach Kirk Ferentz, an Illinois program that's won 19 games over the last two years, and a UCLA team poised to improve under new head coach Bob Chesney, and the Big Ten now has depth that rivals the SEC.

That depth, plus a couple of national championship contenders, has the potential to solidify the Big Ten's place as the No. 1 conference once again in '26.

3

LSU: COLLEGE FOOTBALL'S BIGGEST SOURCE OF INTRIGUE

Considering the drama that frequently seems to surround both LSU's football program and head coach Lane Kiffin, this duo seems like a perfect pairing. However, the expectations are high for Kiffin. Nick Saban, Les Miles and Ed Orgeron all won national titles. Brian Kelly won 34 games over four seasons before his early dismissal. That wasn't good enough. The Bayou Bengals expect to win national championships.

Kiffin transformed Ole Miss into a College Football Playoff contender during a six-year run, but he left Oxford for LSU and one of the top jobs in the nation. The 51-year-old head coach has a better shot to win a national title in Baton Rouge than at Ole Miss.

The program is also sparing no expense to win a championship. Kiffin reportedly had a $40 million war chest of NIL funds to use on roster retention, transfers or incoming freshmen. The Tigers deployed those resources to land one of the top transfer hauls of '26, which includes quarterback Sam Leavitt (Arizona State), offensive lineman Jordan Seaton (Colorado), and several impact receivers and defenders to restock two depleted groups.

With wholesale changes coming to the offensive scheme, along with several new faces on the roster, it may take Kiffin and Co. time to get the Tigers firing on all cylinders. However, acclimating new faces every year was a strength for Kiffin at Ole Miss. But this time, the expectations are even higher. And with a nine-game conference slate in the SEC, the margin for error to get to the playoff is even smaller.

PETRE THOMAS-IMAGN IMAGES

4

TEXAS IS READY TO CONTEND — REALLY

Texas is primed to contend for the national championship in '26. No, seriously this time.

It's no secret that Texas was one of college football's biggest disappointments last season. The Longhorns ranked No. 1 in the Associated Press Top 25 preseason poll, and quarterback Arch Manning opened as the Heisman Trophy favorite despite only two starts under his belt. Although Manning rallied late and guided the team to nine victories, it wasn't the season that most anticipated on the Forty Acres.

Fast-forward to '26, and the hype train has already left the station on the Longhorns and their national title hopes. However, this year's team is different. Manning gained confidence late in the year and performed like a future No. 1 NFL Draft pick. Sarkisian supplemented Manning's supporting cast with three impact transfers, including receiver Cam Coleman from Auburn. Also, an offensive line that lacked depth and talent picked up a couple of contributors from the portal.

Knowing that the status quo wasn't enough, Sarkisian took a big swing on defense. In hopes of elevating this unit to the nation's elite, the Longhorns jettisoned coordinator Pete Kwiatkowski in favor of Will Muschamp.

Sarkisian appeared to make all of the right moves after last year's setback. The pressure is on again, however. Contending for the national title is the expectation in '26.

5 DANTE MOORE'S RETURN COULD LIFT OREGON TO ITS FIRST NATIONAL TITLE

Oregon has won plenty of hardware in the modern era of college football, but one major trophy is missing in Eugene: the national championship.

The Ducks have come close to that goal with two appearances in the national title game since 2010. But head coach Dan Lanning's team may have its best shot to win it all in '26 after an offseason of good news. At the NFL Draft deadline, quarterback Dante Moore and four key members of the defensive front — Teitum Tuioti, Matayo Uiagalelei, Bear Alexander and A'Mauri Washington — all opted to return.

Although Moore was far from a finished product, he likely turned down a top-10 draft spot to return in '26. Moore threw for 3,565 yards and 30 touchdowns last season and ranked fourth nationally in completion rate (71.8%). With another year to grow, Moore should be even better, helping to ease the transition to new play-caller Drew Mehringer.

With 15 starters back, the Ducks have few holes on a roster that went to the College Football Playoff semifinals last year and has won 26 games over the past two seasons. But in addition to another top-five recruiting class, Lanning filled roster voids with 16 incoming transfers.

Three different Big Ten teams have claimed national titles over the past three seasons. With Moore returning, along with a deep and talented roster, Oregon seemingly has all of the pieces in place to extend the Big Ten's title run and add the missing trophy to one of college football's most successful programs in the modern era.

JEFFREY BECKER-IMAGN IMAGES

6 IS TEXAS TECH PULLING AHEAD IN THE BIG 12?

After expansion to 16 teams prior to the 2024 season, the prevailing thought was that the Big 12 would be unpredictable and likely have no dominant program. The unpredictable part held true, but the combination of the transfer portal and NIL deployment allowed Texas Tech to emerge as the clear top program in the conference. The Red Raiders dominated the league in '25 in winning their first Big 12 title.

And they're not going away. Head coach Joey McGuire's program invested heavily in portal acquisitions to restock a defensive front that lost All-Americans in edge rusher David Bailey and linebacker Jacob Rodriguez.

One caveat: Tech transfer quarterback Brendan Sorsby's eligibility is in question due to a gambling investigation, leaving the door open to challengers. BYU returns quarterback Bear Bachmeier and is eager for revenge after two blowout losses to the Red Raiders last season. How Utah navigates the coaching transition from Kyle Whittingham to Morgan Scalley is a question mark, but the Utes always seem to find the right pieces. Houston won 10 games in head coach Willie Fritz's second year and brought back quarterback Conner Weigman among 12 returning starters.

In true Big 12 fashion, a dark-horse contender could emerge. Perhaps Oklahoma State with new head coach Eric Morris and transfer quarterback Drew Mestemaker? Or Kansas State with new head coach Collin Klein developing talented senior Avery Johnson into a superstar QB?

7

CAN INDIANA GO BACK-TO-BACK?

After head coach Curt Cignetti engineered arguably the greatest turnaround in college football history and won Indiana's first national championship in football, going back-to-back would seemingly be impossible for this program. But doubt Cignetti at your own risk.

Replicating last year's run to the title won't be easy, but Indiana has plenty of staying power and ability to fight a history that has witnessed only two programs (Alabama and Georgia) win back-to-back championships since 1998. Cignetti is one of the best evaluators of talent in college football, while coordinators Mike Shanahan (offense) and Bryant Haines (defense) thrive at getting the most out of their players.

A plethora of key players, including quarterback Fernando Mendoza, receivers Elijah Sarratt and Omar Cooper Jr., center Pat Coogan and four key starters on defense, departed after '25. However, Cignetti landed a standout portal class to restock both sides of the ball, and 10 total starters return to provide a solid foundation.

TCU transfer quarterback Josh Hoover should be an outstanding fit for Cignetti's offense, and the supporting cast is strong with Charlie Becker and transfer wideout Nick Marsh (Michigan State) on the outside, along with three returning starters in the trenches. Haines' defense has experience at all three levels and dipped into the portal to restock up front and in the secondary.

The schedule allows time for Cignetti to find the right lineup. Indiana should start 6-0 before a showdown with Ohio State in Bloomington on Oct. 17, followed by a road trip to Michigan the following Saturday.

Going 16-0 for the second year in a row seems unlikely. However, as the key new faces get acclimated, and Cignetti pushes the right buttons on both sides of the ball, the Hoosiers will be a threat once again to make a deep College Football Playoff run.

8

WHAT'S NEXT FOR NORTH CAROLINA IN YEAR 2 UNDER BILL BELICHICK?

The early returns on the Bill Belichick experiment at North Carolina left a lot to be desired. The Tar Heels finished 4-8 and won only two ACC games. The offense averaged a paltry 19.3 points per game and was one of the least explosive units in the nation.

Whether it was the constant drama, poor on-field play or the questionable ability to adapt to the college game, Belichick's first season did nothing to quell doubts about his hire. Also, the Tar Heels didn't opt for a quick fix. Instead, North Carolina brought in more than 40 incoming freshmen. One area where Belichick did seek instant help was on offense. Long-time offensive coordinator Bobby Petrino was hired to jumpstart things, and well-traveled quarterback Billy Edwards Jr. arrived from the transfer portal after a stint at Wisconsin to bring needed stability under center.

In addition to a roster in transition once again, the schedule is more challenging than it was in '25. The Tar Heels play TCU in Ireland to open the season, with road dates at Clemson, Pitt and Duke on tap. Notre Dame, Miami (Fla.), Louisville and NC State visit Chapel Hill.

With Belichick making more than $10 million per season, another losing record and limited on-field progress would prompt plenty of questions about where this experiment is headed.

MARK J. REBILAS-IMAGN IMAGES

9 THE PLAYOFF PATH

Two years of data from the expanded 12-team College Football Playoff field isn't enough to draw sweeping conclusions. However, that short window of time has provided a glimpse of what could be coming this fall.

Only four teams — Oregon, Georgia, Ohio State and Indiana — qualified for both 12-team fields. With the massive roster changes every year due to the transfer portal, the path to a playoff spot is as wide open as ever for a first-time contender or a repeat appearance by last year's new faces.

A breakthrough by a newcomer isn't guaranteed, especially with '25 first-time playoff teams Ole Miss, Texas A&M and Oklahoma all primed to contend for the 12-team field once again. Ole Miss head coach Pete Golding retained quarterback Trinidad Chambliss and running back Kewan Lacy, and momentum is already high for the new era after two playoff wins last season. Quarterback play at Texas A&M (Marcel Reed) and Oklahoma (John Mateer) looms large for both programs' hopes of another berth in the 12-team field.

The most obvious first-time playoff candidates in '26 include a BYU squad that's been knocking on the door in each of the past two years. If new coordinator Gary Patterson can fix the defense, USC has the offensive firepower to join the field from a crowded Big Ten.

So which longshot teams could surprise with a breakthrough playoff appearance? A pair of programs with new head coaches — Florida (Jon Sumrall) or Virginia Tech (James Franklin) — could top the list. Louisville is always a factor in the wide-open ACC, and South Carolina could surprise if head coach Shane Beamer's offseason offensive changes pay off in a big way.

10 KALEN DEBOER'S CRUCIAL THIRD SEASON AT BAMA

Kalen DeBoer's résumé at Alabama — a 20-8 record with one SEC Championship Game and College Football Playoff appearance — is a two-year run that many teams in college football would take. But Alabama is no ordinary program, and DeBoer had the impossible assignment of replacing Nick Saban, arguably the greatest coach in college football history.

The '26 campaign marks a crucial point of DeBoer's tenure. The trademark physicality and rushing attack Alabama is known for were missing in '25. The Crimson Tide finished 15th in the SEC in rushing and ranked 13th in sacks allowed (32). Five-star freshman Ezavier Crowell could provide a much-needed big-play threat in the backfield, but a greater concern is how a completely revamped offensive line meshes this offseason.

DeBoer and offensive coordinator Ryan Grubb have a strong track record of quarterback development, and two intriguing candidates in Austin Mack and former touted 5-star prospect Keelon Russell will battle for the job this fall. Whichever quarterback starts will need receiver Ryan Coleman-Williams to bounce back after an up-and-down sophomore campaign.

Alabama enters '26 with more concerns than at any time in recent memory. This season, it's important for DeBoer, who signed a new seven-year contract that will pay him $12.5 million per season, to show that the program is still on solid footing and poised to reload and contend once again in the SEC.

11 CAN DEION GET COLORADO BACK ON TRACK?

Life after Travis Hunter and Shedeur Sanders was expected to be challenging for Colorado in 2025. However, the drop-off to 3-9 and just one win in Big 12 play was a steeper regression than most anticipated.

Head coach Deion Sanders isn't on the hot seat, but the urgency to get this program back on track was evident this offseason. Another massive roster overhaul came via the portal. For the fourth consecutive year, the Buffaloes reeled in more than 30 transfers. Additionally, Coach Prime retooled his staff. Both sides of the ball feature new play-callers, with Chris Marve promoted to handle defensive signals and former Sacramento State head coach Brennan Marion bringing his innovative Go-Go offense to Boulder.

Although only four starters return, and there are gaping holes to plug on defense, the cupboard isn't empty. Redshirt freshman quarterback Julian Lewis is promising and should be a good fit for Marion's offense. Additionally, San José State transfer receiver Danny Scudero led the nation with 1,297 receiving yards last year and is among the Big 12's top incoming portal additions.

Colorado's slate is full of toss-up games, bringing the likelihood of several close contests. Sanders overcame a serious health issue to coach all 12 games for the Buffaloes in '25. If the changes fail to turn this program around, there will be plenty of concerns that the '24 success was just a one-year mirage — and doubts as to whether Sanders is the right coach to navigate another rebuild.

FROM LEFT: KIRBY LEE-IMAGN IMAGES; RON CHENOY-IMAGN IMAGES

12

PRESSURE BUILDING AT CLEMSON

Is the 2026 season the start of a comeback for Clemson and head coach Dabo Swinney? Or perhaps the beginning of the end?

The Tigers were arguably the biggest disappointment in college football last season. After an ACC title and College Football Playoff trip in '24, the return of 14 starters and plenty of star power on both sides of the ball positioned Swinney's program as one of the favorites to win it all in '25. But instead of building on the '24 postseason showing, the Tigers slumped to 7-6 overall.

In an effort to get the program back on track, Swinney passed on fresh ideas and doubled down on familiarity. Chad Morris returns as offensive coordinator after a prolific run from 2011-14, with former players Tajh Boyd and Nolan Turner promoted to full-time roles on the staff.

However, the urgency of getting back on track in '26 was underscored by the largest portal class under Swinney, with 10 incoming transfers.

With only eight returning starters, Clemson's roster has more question marks than in recent years. There's a new quarterback (Christopher Vizzina), three starters gone up front and holes to fill at every level on defense.

Swinney's run of six consecutive top-five finishes and double-digit win seasons (2015-20) is tough to replicate in the current era of college football. Additionally, Swinney has been slow at times to adapt to the transfer portal/NIL era. Were the offseason changes enough to get back on track? Or is Clemson set for another disappointing record, which raises plenty of questions about Swinney's future? The '26 season will be telling.

13

RETURN OF THE PAC-12, GROUP OF 6 REALIGNMENT AND FBS NEWCOMERS

The one constant in college football in recent years has been change. Although the power conferences were quiet on the realignment front this offseason, there was movement in the Group of 6 leagues.

After a two-year hiatus, the Pac-12 returns as a full football conference with eight members in '26. The Mountain West was hit hard by departures with Boise State, Fresno State, Colorado State, San Diego State and Utah State leaving to join Oregon State and Washington State in the revamped league. Texas State also left the Sun Belt to join the Pac-12.

The Mountain West responded by adding UTEP (Conference USA) and Northern Illinois (MAC) and convincing 10-time FCS champion North Dakota State to make the jump to the FBS. The Sun Belt also raided CUSA, adding Louisiana Tech to replace Texas State as its 14th member.

FBS membership grew to 138 teams when the MAC accepted Sacramento State on a five-year, financially friendly deal.

VINCENT CARCHIETTA-IMAGN IMAGES

14

A USC BREAKTHROUGH?

Lincoln Riley's arrival brought high expectations and raised the bar for a USC program looking to rejoin the nation's elite. So far, the results have been mixed. The Trojans won 11 games and played for the Pac-12 title in Riley's debut but are just 24-15 over the past three seasons.

With the program fully acclimated to the Big Ten, ample resources provided for NIL and staffing and the No. 1 recruiting class arriving in '26, Riley has all of the pieces to deliver on the optimism his hire brought prior to the '22 season.

Is the '26 campaign the start of a return to national prominence under Riley? Or will this season only lead to more questions? The Trojans return 14 starters from last year's nine-win team, including quarterback Jayden Maiava and all five offensive linemen. Standout receivers Makai Lemon and Ja'Kobi Lane will be missed, but Riley's track record suggests that the offense won't miss a beat.

However, Riley's defenses have lagged, and it remains the team's biggest weakness in '26. Although the Trojans made small gains under former coordinator D'Anton Lynn, his departure to Penn State allowed Riley to lure former TCU head coach Gary Patterson back to an on-field role as the team's play-caller. Five starters are back, but Patterson has holes to fill at every level on a unit that allowed 5.8 yards per snap in Big Ten play.

USC has a challenging schedule with Ohio State, Indiana and Oregon all appearing on the '26 slate. But if the defense improves, the Trojans seemingly have all of the components for the program's first College Football Playoff trip, which would certainly cool the pressure on Riley in a critical fifth season.

JAYNE KAMIN-ONCEA-IMAGN IMAGES

15 SUNSHINE STATE INTRIGUE

Intrigue is never in short supply for the "Big Three" in the Sunshine State. That's especially true entering '26.

Until last season, Florida, Florida State and Miami hadn't figured prominently in the College Football Playoff conversation in recent years. However, "The U" returned to national prominence with three playoff victories and a four-quarter battle with Indiana in the national championship game. Head coach Mario Cristobal's elite recruiting and precise portal additions have solidified Miami as the team to beat in the ACC once again. Duke transfer Darian Mensah was a huge late pickup from the portal to replace Carson Beck under center. Receiver Malachi Toney returns after a breakout freshman campaign, and Cristobal should once again find the right answers in the trenches. As last year's playoff run showed, the Canes are back as a national power and a threat to win it all once again in '26.

The outlook isn't as rosy on the other side of the state. FSU head coach Mike Norvell is squarely on the hot seat after back-to-back losing seasons. And if it weren't for a hefty buyout, the Seminoles likely would've shopped for a new coach in an active carousel. A winning season would certainly cool the pressure on Norvell. However, a challenging schedule and plenty of roster concerns have yielded low expectations in '26.

A promising new era is underway in Gainesville. New head coach Jon Sumrall is an SEC veteran and was successful at two different jobs (Tulane and Troy) in the conference footprint. Sumrall inherited a talented roster and made two of the best coordinator hires in the nation by bringing Buster Faulkner (Georgia Tech) and Brad White (Kentucky) to Florida. The odds of a turnaround seem high in Year 1. A nine-win season is within reach if the Gators find the right answers on a rebuilt offensive line and pick the right quarterback.

Q&A

A conversation with CURT CIGNETTI

Indiana has turned the page on 2025, but Cignetti's Hoosiers aren't going anywhere

Curt Cignetti has "spring anxiety" every year — even this year, after guiding Indiana to its first national championship. The coach who changed everything at IU has fully turned the page on a 16-0 season that set records and revised what's possible in a sport normally dominated by a small group of programs that have been there and done that.

Indiana did it all in 2025, putting together one of the greatest seasons in college football history, but Cignetti is fully focused on the follow-up. The Hoosiers have positioned themselves to remain in the national title race. They retained all three coordinators, including Broyles Award winner Bryant Haines on defense, and had only one staff change for the second straight year. They bring back top players on both sides of the ball and made significant portal additions, such as quarterback Josh Hoover (TCU), wide receiver Nick Marsh (Michigan State), guard Joe Brunner (Wisconsin) and edge rushers Joshua Burnham from Notre Dame and Tobi Osunsanmi and Chiddi Obiazor from Kansas State.

But Cignetti is still antsy, after a spring when Indiana was shorthanded on offense and breaking in Hoover and other key newcomers. The Hoosiers must replace quarterback Fernando Mendoza, their first Heisman Trophy winner and No. 1 overall NFL draft pick, as well as All-America defenders D'Angelo Ponds and Aiden Fisher, wide receivers Omar Cooper Jr. and Elijah Sarratt and other standouts.

Cignetti spoke with *Athlon Sports* about what has changed at Indiana, what has remained the same and turning the page to the 2026 season.

Athlon Sports: **What do you sense could be the personality of this year's team, or some of the things that have changed the most, just given the roster changes?**

Curt Cignetti: Every year, you start over, and nowadays in college football, you've got a lot of new faces. We have a lot of new faces, obviously, my first year, last year and this year. You're kind of developing guys — how you practice, standards (besides scheme), how you want to play the game. The practices have been clean, crisp, and I like the competition. They're far from perfect. We've got a lot of work to do in the fall because the team's going to look a lot different in the fall. But in terms of the mindset and the work ethic and the way they're getting after it in practice, I think they're on par.

> "ANYTIME YOU DO SOMETHING TWICE, YOU'RE BETTER THE SECOND TIME.

When you achieve what you've achieved, is it easier to turn the page or harder?

Obviously, a lot of people on the outside are still celebrating our success, and maybe the administration and people at the university, but in the building you flip the page. I think we've done a good job of that, I really do. There's a lot of work to be done. Everybody's 0-0 right now. All the new guys that are out there have done some good things and some not-so-good things, and usually they have a great summer, and they're a different guy in fall camp and during the season. We're counting on them being on the same trajectory as the other ones, but I don't notice anybody resting on their laurels.

BRETT DAVIS-IMAGN IMAGES

> EVERY YEAR, YOU START OVER, AND NOWADAYS IN COLLEGE FOOTBALL, YOU'VE GOT A LOT OF NEW FACES.

Who do you lean on for leadership?
It's early right now. Leadership develops a lot more in fall camp and then in-season. But right now, you're looking at guys like [LB] Isaiah Jones, [DT] Tyrique Tucker, [C] Drew Evans, [OT] Carter Smith.

Offensive line was a group you wanted to augment a little bit. What do you sense with that group?
We return four guys who have started a lot of games, and [tackle Adedamola] Ajani started games last year; he's a little younger. Now it's a matter of who's going to be number six, seven and eight, and we've got young guys who have developed and can fit in those roles.

Who has stood out among your transfers?
The two Kansas State guys, the D-ends [Tobi Osunsanmi and Chiddi Obiazor], I've noticed them really starting to take a step. Turbo [Richard] is very consistent at running back. [OG] Joe Brunner from Wisconsin. The safety from Wisconsin, [Preston] Zachman, is making nice progress. Yeah. Both receivers — Shazz [Preston] and [Nick] Marsh — can help us.

What is unique about Josh Hoover's skill set that's different from the last two quarterbacks you've had?
He's a quick thinker who has played a lot of football. He moves better than [Kurtis] Rourke, but Rourke has some natural quarterback instincts that Josh has, too. Fernando [Mendoza], he's 6-foot-5, could really move. We've always tilted more toward the run in terms of the run-pass ratio, although in competitive situations last year, we're about 50-50. You factor in the RPO game, the advanced throws, which should be easy completions. Whereas, where [Hoover] came from, they're throwing the ball about 60% of the time. It'll be a lot different for him, more advantageous. He did turn the ball over at TCU, so we're going to have to do a great job of protecting the ball.

Everyone's trying to replicate what you guys did. What have you learned about this place and the way that it's set up as a university, as an alumni base, even after the fact, that's contributed to where you guys sit right now?
This doesn't get done without the commitment from the top. [University president] Pam Whitten grew up in the South. She loves football, she's

RICH JANZARUK/HERALD-TIMES

THE CIGNETTI FILE

- Career Record: 146-37 (.797 winning percentage)
- 53-17 at Div. II IUP (2011-16)
- 14-9 at FCS Elon (2017-18)
- 33-5 at FCS James Madison (2019-21)
- 19-4 at FBS James Madison (2022-23)
- 27-2 at Indiana (2024-25)
- Led the Hoosiers to the first 16-0 season in college football history
- Coached Indiana's first Heisman Trophy winner, QB Fernando Mendoza, who was one of two consensus IU All-Americans in 2025, joining OT Carter Smith
- Two-time AP Coach of the Year (2024, 2025)
- Paul "Bear" Bryant National Coach of the Year (2025)
- Two-time Big Ten Coach of the Year (2024, 2025)
- Winner of five conference championships (one Div. II Pennsylvania State Athletic Conference, three FCS Colonial Athletic, one Big Ten)
- In four seasons as an assistant coach under Nick Saban at Alabama (2007-10), the Crimson Tide posted a 42-11 record (including a 29-game regular-season winning streak) and won a national championship
- Helped recruit and develop key Crimson Tide players such as Heisman Trophy-winning RB Mark Ingram II and WR Julio Jones
- In addition to Saban, coached under Bobby Bowden (West Virginia) and Chuck Amato (NC State)

committed to see it go. I think once everybody saw what football could do for the university, the town, the alumni base, the state and nationally, once we started winning, they kept pouring more and more in. Her and [athletic director] Scott [Dolson], I just really respect both of them a lot; we're totally aligned. The alignment is the key, and then the staff continuity has been really critical for me.

You mentioned the continuity. You know how this business is — it's so hard to keep assistants. What would you say have been the biggest factors in the fact that the staff has barely changed?

It's just been such a unique journey. So you hire [current defensive coordinator Bryant] Haines and [current offensive coordinator Mike] Shanahan as part-time coaches for under $10,000, and you keep moving on, right? And we keep winning, and their jobs improve, and their salaries improve, and I think there's a loyalty and they like the way we do things. They've got free time, too. I'm not keeping them in the office from 6 a.m. to 11 at night. So I think that's why they've stayed when they've had opportunities to leave.

You mentioned that a lot of times your teams get better in the summer. Why does that happen?

The summer, the strength and conditioning staff handles that. And then there's 7-on-7 and things like that. And they've gone through the spring, they've been through the plays one time. They're getting bigger, stronger, faster, again, kind of bonding in the summer, getting to know each other better. And then in fall camp, it's the second time through.

Anytime you do something twice, you're better the second time. Last year's team did a great job — their consistency, day in, day out, was the best I've had. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, having the mindset on Friday and then putting it between the white lines, like we asked him to, doing the things we asked him to do. You know, fast, physical, relentless, that whole thing, smart, disciplined, poised, not affected by success or failure, never satisfied until the end, one play at a time, six seconds a play. A play has a life and a history of its own. But that team was extremely consistent day in, day out. And you know, it helps to have guys who are smart and combine the team concept, and then you develop that togetherness and belief.

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE SEC

You remember. The Strength Everywhere Conference of Saban, Sankey and Smart. The league that produced Heisman Trophies and high draft picks. The football consortium that had been hoarding national championships at a record pace since before some current freshmen were born. What used to be the center of the college football universe. That Southeastern Conference.

It can now be logically concluded that the SEC is in a slump. Or a downturn. Or a recession, or whatever you want to call it. Maybe something worse.

It's no longer just a talking point. It's a football fact. After winning 13 titles in 17 years, the SEC has missed the national championship game three years in a row for the first time since 2001. That's a nice, tidy introduction to a story that will help define the 2026 season and beyond.

This account doesn't get past the intro without mentioning the Big Ten's role in what is increasingly looking like a takeover. The league has won three consecutive football national championships for the first time since 1942. For starters. Mix in Michigan hoops, and the Big Ten holds the men's basketball and football championships simultaneously for the first time since 1960 — or since a sophomore named Bob Knight was coming off the bench for Ohio State, and since the immortal Murray Warmath led the Minnesota Golden Gophers to the Rose Bowl.

Throw in UCLA women's hoops, and the Big Ten is the first Division I conference with three different schools winning in football and men's and women's basketball in the same academic year.

For those used to the lofty, sweet home Southern standard the SEC

The Big Ten has eclipsed college football's former behemoth. Can the SEC reclaim its throne?

BY DENNIS DODD

has set all these years, these are tough times.

"I'm sitting in Birmingham right now across from SEC headquarters," radio and television personality Paul Finebaum told *Athlon Sports* during the offseason. "I can't speak for them, but I can speak for myself. I can tell you there is real concern.

"It was part of our psyche that we were better, and we wore it on our sleeve. We would tell anybody who would listen. This is a shock to the system."

At worst, the SEC has been lapped by its chief conference rival. For the moment, the Big Ten has cracked the code on NIL, the transfer portal, player development, program building and return on recruiting investment.

Finebaum, ESPN's face-of-the-conference who appears daily on the SEC Network spreading the league's good word as if it were biblical revelation, is not the only one who's noticed.

"Michigan was one thing," Finebaum said of the Wolverines' 2023 title. "Ohio State [in 2024]. But then Indiana. Nobody down here respects Indiana."

They may be starting to, especially after the Hoosiers' 38-3 clubbing of Alabama in the College Football Playoff Rose Bowl quarterfinal. A school from the county seat of Monroe County, Indiana, buzz-sawing its way to a national championship through the Crimson Tide was a helmet slap for the entire SEC.

"That to me was the Waterloo," Finebaum added. "Watching that destruction. Watching Alabama players quit in the fourth quarter. I've never encountered anything like that."

Other cracks are showing.

When the Big Ten's USC finished with the nation's No. 1 recruiting class in 2026 per *247Sports*, that ended a run of 18 years with SEC schools holding the No. 1 spot in that ranking.

The SEC just finished with its all-time worst single-season bowl record at 2-8. The conference was favored to win seven of the 10 games (not counting the head-to-head matchup between Oklahoma and Alabama in the playoff).

In 2024, SMU — in its first year in the ACC — was selected to the CFP over Alabama. A case could have been made for and against the Tide after a 9-4 season, but the fact that SMU — which had spent almost four decades wandering in the wilderness outside power conference football — made such an impression on the selection committee was significant.

> It was part of our psyche that we were better, and we wore it on our sleeve. We would tell anybody who would listen. **This is a shock to the system.**
>
> — PAUL FINEBAUM

Not surprisingly, the pressure to win in the SEC has never been more intense. Since the beginning of 2022, nine of 16 schools have changed coaches at least once. In one two-day period last year (Nov. 30-Dec. 1), six SEC schools announced new football coaches. In Saban's 17 seasons at Alabama, the other SEC schools hired 54 different coaches.

The guy to follow the guy, Kalen DeBoer, has yet to fully prove himself at Alabama. Brian Kelly didn't get it done at LSU. Lane Kiffin had sure as hell better. Steve Sarkisian has to win a championship at some point at Texas to be considered a success in Austin, doesn't he? Florida and Auburn continue to struggle. Ryan Silverfield is Arkansas' third head coach since 2019.

And it may be a while before the SEC's prestige is restored. It's hard to find an SEC team in Vegas with a projected double-digit win total in 2026. Georgia and Texas are typically the leaders in that category at 9.5.

Also, the decision to add a ninth conference game means that half the league is guaranteed to have an extra loss beginning this season. No wonder some SEC types are ready to junk the championship game.

It just means *more*.

Finebaum joked on the air last summer that if the Big Ten won another title, he was going to leave the country. "A lot of people took me seriously," he said.

He stayed in the country, but his eyes widened.

"It's got some historical feeling about it," Finebaum said of the current state of the SEC. "How could this happen to us?"

For one, Big Ten commissioner Tony Petitti happened. The 65-year-old son of a New York City cop is a TV guy. He came up as a sports executive at CBS, ABC and Major League Baseball. His best college experience was programming college football, not watching the parade go by.

He's an innovator for whom bigger is better. Petitti secured Oregon and Washington in the last round of expansion. He floated the idea of Big Ten play-in games for the playoff. His 24-team playoff model that was circulated in the offseason makes too much sense.

That idea is also in direct conflict with his peer, SEC commissioner Greg Sankey. The ongoing King Kong-vs.-Godzilla battle for sport's levers of power continues.

Jim Harbaugh also happened.

The Big Ten's rise and the SEC's slide both occurred about the same time that legal player compensation started.

Michigan's quirky coach embraced NIL in 2023. Not surprisingly, that same year Harbs survived questions about his job security and won it all in his ninth season with the Wolverines. Pay no attention to his treading all over the NCAA rulebook amid multiple scandals

and suspensions to get to the top.

Most telling, Harbaugh sledgehammered home a style that had been perfected by the SEC. Physical. Conservative. Dominant at the line of scrimmage. Almost boring when it was all clicking. Devastating when Michigan football became an SEC doppelgänger.

Ryan Day also happened. In 2024, Ohio State had to mentally recover from a crippling loss to Michigan in order to win it all. In the space of seven weeks, the Buckeyes' head coach went from whispers of being let go to national champion. He remains the game's winningest active coach.

In 2024, Curt Cignetti came out of nowhere. (OK, technically, he came from James Madison.) It can be sensibly argued that Indiana's success caused a nationwide panic beyond the SEC with administrators everywhere asking, "Why can't we do that?"

Why, indeed? It can be argued the SEC began its current downturn on Jan. 10, 2024, the day Nick Saban retired. That moment was always going to come for the greatest college coach of all time as he eased into his 70s. But when it did, it was still a shock to the SEC's soul.

Saban's brilliance in recruiting, player development and strategy was unmatched. His influence is scattered all over the game in the form of scores of assistants who learned at his feet.

But Saban had tired of the NIL landscape. And unfortunately, there was no one to replace him. Not yet. Not at that level.

The Big Ten has pulled off a lightning-fast renovation. Once mocked for its slow, plodding style of play, the league — at least at the top — has taken over the game.

A year after tying its own record of 15 first-round NFL Draft picks in 2025, the SEC has lost its draft domination. Ohio State alone had more top-11 picks (four) than the entire SEC combined (one).

After not having a quarterback go No. 1 overall in the draft since 1990 (Jeff George, Illinois), Big Ten quarterbacks have been the No. 1 pick two of the last three seasons. In April, Fernando Mendoza was the No. 1 overall pick of the Las Vegas Raiders. USC's Caleb Williams went No. 1 overall to the Chicago Bears in 2024.

The SEC is in the midst of its longest championship drought since 1999-2002. We are long since past the point of asking what went wrong in the SEC and how to fix it.

Kalen DeBoer has yet to fully prove himself at Alabama. Brian Kelly didn't get it done at LSU. Lane Kiffin had sure as hell better. Steve Sarkisian has to win a championship at some point at Texas to be considered a success in Austin, doesn't he? Florida and Auburn continue to struggle. Ryan Silverfield is Arkansas' third head coach since 2019.

Everything in college football is cyclical, from style of play to style of polo shirts worn by assistants. What we are witnessing is something more significant. College athletics is in a period of peak disruption.

The urgency and ability to acquire plug-and-play transfers are at odds with the timeworn — and, some believe, time-sucking — practice of developing high school talent. The likes of Indiana, Ohio State and Michigan have maintained roster consistency better than anyone lately.

Meanwhile, the SEC is chasing a legacy instead of creating one. With six championships at Alabama — a record seven overall, including at LSU in 2003 — Saban created a standard that can't be matched. Anywhere. That was a different era.

The most popular term these days is "alignment" — where coach, AD and president all agree on the mission, money and moxie it takes to make it all work.

As a result, in a sport that has never embraced underdogs, the portal and NIL have brought a form of parity that never existed in college football. Vanderbilt stuck a foot in the door. James Madison and Tulane got to the College Football Playoff. Hired less than three months apart, Indiana's Curt Cignetti (football) and Michigan's Dusty May (basketball) each took their programs from the bottom of the Big Ten to a national championship in two years on the job.

The SEC's current situation crystallized in late 2023 when an Alabama staffer turned to me in the run-up to that season's CFP semifinal Rose Bowl against Michigan. "We've only got one billionaire in Alabama," he complained. "They've got seven at [the University of] Texas."

A few days later, Saban coached his last game.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: KIRBY LEE-IMAGN IMAGES; MATTHEW HINTON-IMAGN IMAGES; BRETT ROJO-IMAGN IMAGES; PETRE THOMAS-IMAGN IMAGES; STEPHEN LEW-IMAGN IMAGES

"Adapt or die," Texas head coach Steve Sarkisian has repeatedly said of the current landscape.

Michigan adapted during the summer of 2024. The program realized it had to get into the NIL game after 5-star quarterback Bryce Underwood had committed to LSU.

It (eventually) became unacceptable to Michigan that Underwood, from nearby Belleville, Michigan, would leave for the SEC, especially with the Wolverines needing a quarterback. Billionaire Michigan alum Larry Ellison then reportedly ponied up $10 million for Underwood.

While not a big donor at the beginning of the Cignetti era, Mark Cuban has become another Big Ten billionaire who fuels his alma mater's fortunes.

"I really jumped in because how [Cignetti] approaches building a program. They weren't about, 'OK, give me enough money to win the portal,'" Cuban told CBS Sports HQ. "He had a very specific approach to his culture. … He said, 'I want production, not future, not potential.'"

Ohio State paid a reported $20 million for the roster that won the 2024 title. That figure is now outdated. We head into the 2026 season with the top programs paying $50 million to assemble a top-shelf roster.

Is the SEC all in? Is it heresy to even ask that question? LSU certainly pushed all its chips to the middle of the Death Valley playing surface. It blatantly went after Kiffin, the self-described "Portal King," while he was leading Ole Miss to a playoff berth. Ethics, hurt feelings and financial constraints be damned.

Remember way back four years ago when Tennessee threw $8 million at quarterback Nico Iamaleava? Hey, nobody said then or now that any of the numbers make sense.

After winning back-to-back national titles in 2021-22, Georgia hasn't advanced past the CFP quarterfinals, even while winning the 2025 SEC title. Sorry, but that's a net decline in Athens.

Whoever replaced Saban wasn't going to measure up. To many always-rational Bama fans — sarcasm tag added — DeBoer certainly hasn't, despite a playoff appearance in his second season.

"There is still an arrogance [among SEC fans]," Finebaum said. "Alabama fans are probably having the hardest time."

Parity has allowed any program to get players from anywhere as long as the fit, alignment and money are right. Ohio State enticed Alabama freshman All-America safety Caleb Downs to transfer after Saban retired. May's starting five at Michigan were all transfers.

What the Big Ten has been able to do lately is bridge the mysterious gap between player compensation and success on the field.

"You still need great coaching," Petitti told Front Office Sports. "You still need a commitment to winning, and performing at the high level, coming together, and building and developing players. I don't think that's ever going to change."

The Big Ten, born in a downtown Chicago hotel in 1896, has always been the richest conference. Bigger markets, deeper pockets, bigger alumni bases than anyone else.

It didn't matter very much until the late 1980s, when media rights revenue became an advantage to be exploited. The Big Ten was the first conference to expand in the modern era after the deregulation of college football television when Penn State joined in 1990 (PSU football began conference play in 1993). Former SEC commissioner Roy Kramer followed suit, adding South Carolina and Arkansas in 1992.

The power at the top of college athletics is now consolidated in 34 schools — 18 in the Big Ten, 16 in the SEC. In its latest financial statement, the SEC distributed a record $1.03 billion ($72.4 million per school). The Big Ten, whose figures hadn't been released at press time, was expected to distribute $1.2 billion ($75 million per school). The Big Ten is expected to be paying $100 million per school at the end of its current media rights deal early in the next decade.

You can see where this is headed — a rivalry decided with ruthless hits on the field and monstrous balance sheets off of it.

For the moment, advantage Big Ten. For the first time in the modern age, the league has weaponized its financial advantage.

"A lot of the schools in the Southeastern Conference don't have that kind of old-time generational wealth," Saban said last year.

An SEC lapse was bound to happen. Simple statistical theory states there will always be a regression to the mean. College football wouldn't always be tipped in the SEC's favor. Thirteen championships in 17 years were unprecedented. A confluence of media, coaching, recruiting, player development and fortune has shifted in the Big Ten's favor.

The relationship remains complicated because the leagues are both rivals and partners. They control the size and structure of the playoff on their own. Last year, the rest of the FBS acquiesced to the SEC and Big Ten getting an annual revenue share of 29% of the CFP.

Forget debating whether that was fair or not. It just was. The FBS can't field a legitimate playoff without the two mega-conferences. The SEC and Big Ten have made it clear that they could stage their own 34-team playoff.

"How do we work with colleagues to solve problems? Can we do that collectively?" Sankey said on Finebaum's show in March. "If there's a point at which we cannot do so, I think the conversation that informs the question that you ask, 'Is there something you'd do alone?' I think that starts to generate more and more interest."

Yikes. As much as they are going at each other's throats, whatever happens in the future of college athletics is going to be manipulated by/guided by the SEC and Big Ten.

So how does the SEC regain its primacy? Win more playoff games for sure. Crack that NIL code. Find the next Mendoza. Gosh, it's been almost three years since the SEC won a Heisman. Maybe keep Kiffin away from a keyboard.

Maybe look more like … Indiana?

ACC PREVIEW

PREDICTED ORDER OF FINISH

1. MIAMI HURRICANES
2. SMU MUSTANGS
3. LOUISVILLE CARDINALS
4. CLEMSON TIGERS
5. VIRGINIA TECH HOKIES
6. VIRGINIA CAVALIERS
7. PITT PANTHERS
8. GEORGIA TECH YELLOW JACKETS
9. NC STATE WOLFPACK
10. CAL GOLDEN BEARS
11. FLORIDA STATE SEMINOLES
12. WAKE FOREST DEMON DEACONS
13. DUKE BLUE DEVILS
14. NORTH CAROLINA TAR HEELS
15. SYRACUSE ORANGE
16. BOSTON COLLEGE EAGLES
17. STANFORD CARDINAL

ACC CHAMPIONSHIP

MIAMI OVER SMU

ALL-ACC TEAM

FIRST-TEAM OFFENSE

QB	DARIAN MENSAH	Miami (Fla.)
RB	ISAAC BROWN	Louisville
RB	MARK FLETCHER JR.	Miami (Fla.)
AP	MALACHI TONEY	Miami (Fla.)
WR	DUCE ROBINSON	Florida State
WR	COOPER BARKATE	Miami (Fla.)
WR	BRYANT WESCO JR.	Clemson
TE	LUKE REYNOLDS	Virginia Tech
C	JOSHUA BATES	SMU
OL	PJ WILLIAMS	SMU
OL	McKALE BOLEY	Virginia
OL	LANCE ROBINSON	Louisville
OL	ETHAN MACKENNY	Georgia Tech

FIRST-TEAM DEFENSE

DL	DAMON WILSON II	Miami (Fla.)
DL	CLEV LUBIN	Louisville
DL	WILL HELDT	Clemson
DL	MELKART ABOU JAOUDE	North Carolina
LB	SAMMY BROWN	Clemson
LB	MATT ROSE	Stanford
LB	BRAYLAN LOVELACE	Pitt
LB	KAM ROBINSON	Virginia
DB	ASHTON HAMPTON	Clemson
DB	TAYON HOLLOWAY	Louisville
DB	BRYCE FITZGERALD	Miami (Fla.)
DB	CHRIS PEAL	Syracuse

FIRST-TEAM SPECIALISTS

K	AIDAN BIRR	Georgia Tech
P	DYLAN JOYCE	Miami (Fla.)
KR	TRE RICHARDSON	Louisville
PR	MALACHI TONEY	Miami (Fla.)

BOWL PROJECTIONS

Gasparilla: Georgia Tech vs. Memphis
First Responder: Cal vs. Washington State
Military: Wake Forest vs. Temple
Pinstripe: Pitt vs. Minnesota
Fenway: NC State vs. Army
Pop-Tarts: Louisville vs. Houston
Gator: SMU vs. Alabama
Sun: Virginia vs. Utah
Duke's Mayo: Virginia Tech vs. Tennessee
Holiday: Clemson vs. Washington
College Football Playoff First Round: Miami (Fla.) vs. LSU

JOIN COLLEGE FOOTBALL EXPERT STEVEN LASSAN AT ATHLONSPORTS.COM FOR A LOOK AT SECOND- AND THIRD-TEAM SELECTIONS

COORDINATOR CAROUSEL

BOSTON COLLEGE
Offense: New: Bill O'Brien; Old: Will Lawing
Defense: New: Ted Roof; Old: Tim Lewis

CAL
Offense: New: Jordan Somerville, Ike Hilliard; Old: Bryan Harsin
Defense: New: Michael Hutchings, Da'Von Brown; Old: Vic So'oto, Terrence Brown

CLEMSON
Offense: New: Chad Morris
Old: Garrett Riley

FLORIDA STATE
Offense: New: Mike Norvell, Tim Harris Jr.; Old: Gus Malzahn

GEORGIA TECH
Offense: New: George Godsey, Chris Weinke; Old: Buster Faulkner
Defense: New: Jason Semore
Old: Blake Gideon

LOUISVILLE
Defense: New: Mark Ivey, Steve Ellis
Old: Ron English, Mark Hagen

NORTH CAROLINA
Offense: New: Bobby Petrino
Old: Freddie Kitchens

PITT
Defense: New: Cory Sanders
Old: Randy Bates

SMU
Offense: New: Garin Justice, D'Eriq King; Old: Casey Woods
Defense: New: Maurice Crum Jr., Rickey Hunley Jr.; Old: Scott Symons

STANFORD
Offense: New: Terry Heffernan
Old: Nate Byham
Defense: New: Kris Richard
Old: Bobby April, Andy Thompson

SYRACUSE
Defense: New: Vince Kehres, John Scott Jr.; Old: Elijah Robinson, Robert Wright

VIRGINIA TECH
Offense: New: Ty Howle
Old: Philip Montgomery
Defense: New: Brent Pry
Old: Sam Siefkes

TOP 10 RECRUITS

	NAME	POS.	SCHOOL	RATING	NAT. RANK
1.	Jackson Cantwell	OT	Miami (Fla.)	★★★★★+	3
2.	Somourian Wingo	WR	Miami (Fla.)	★★★★	37
3.	Naeem Burroughs	WR	Clemson	★★★★	42
4.	Gavin Mueller	TE	Miami (Fla.)	★★★★	45
5.	Asharri Charles	EDGE	Miami (Fla.)	★★★★	85
6.	Keshawn Stancil	DL	Miami (Fla.)	★★★★	91
7.	Kenton Dopson III	CB	North Carolina	★★★★	94
8.	Milan Parris	WR	Miami (Fla.)	★★★★	109
9.	Izayia Williams	LB	Florida State	★★★★	116
10.	Earnest Rankins	DL	Florida State	★★★★	125

Rankings per Rivals; +Consensus 5-star prospect

BRAYLAN LOVELACE, PITT
DARIAN MENSAH, MIAMI (FLA.)

FROM LEFT: BRETT DAVIS-IMAGN IMAGES; MARK KOZLOWSKI-IMAGN IMAGES

TOP TRANSFERS

	NAME	POS.	SCHOOL	FORMER SCHOOL
1.	**Darian Mensah**	QB	Miami (Fla.)	Duke
	Mensah led the ACC in passing, and his supporting cast will be even better.			
2.	**Damon Wilson II**	DL	Miami (Fla.)	Missouri
	UM needs pass rush production, and here comes Wilson fresh off a nine-sack season.			
3.	**Cooper Barkate**	WR	Miami (Fla.)	Duke
	Barkate followed Mensah south after his second consecutive 1,000-yard season.			
4.	**Ethan Grunkemeyer**	QB	Virginia Tech	Penn State
	Grunkemeyer follows head coach James Franklin to the ACC.			
5.	**Justice Haynes**	RB	Georgia Tech	Michigan
	Haynes is a big-play back with a nose for the end zone.			
6.	**Lincoln Kienholz**	QB	Louisville	Ohio State
	The Cardinals went back to the portal for their QB and betting on a blue-chip talent.			
7.	**Luke Reynolds**	TE	Virginia Tech	Penn State
	Reynolds is a former 5-star recruit who followed Franklin to Blacksburg.			
8.	**Que'Sean Brown**	WR	Virginia Tech	Duke
	Brown broke out last season and could become Grunkemeyer's go-to target.			
9.	**Tre Richardson**	WR	Louisville	Vanderbilt
	Richardson was among the best deep-threat options in the SEC in his FBS debut.			
10.	**Ian Strong**	WR	Cal	Rutgers
	Strong has the size (6-foot-4) and skill to win on the outside.			

RECRUITING RANKINGS BY SCHOOL

1. Miami (Fla.) (7)
2. Florida State (16)
3. North Carolina (21)
4. Clemson (22)
5. Wake Forest (29)
6. SMU (31)
7. Virginia Tech (33)
8. Syracuse (36)
9. Stanford (38)
10. Georgia Tech (39)
11. NC State (40)
12. Louisville (46)
13. Pitt (55)
14. Boston College (56)
15. Cal (57)
16. Duke (78)
17. Virginia (113)

Rankings per Rivals; National ranking in parentheses

GAMES TO WATCH

Sept. 5	Clemson at LSU
Sept. 6	Louisville vs. Ole Miss (Nashville)
Sept. 19	SMU at Louisville
Oct. 3	Miami (Fla.) at Clemson
Oct. 31	Clemson at Florida State
Nov. 7	Louisville at Georgia Tech
Nov. 7	Virginia Tech at SMU
Nov. 7	Miami (Fla.) at Notre Dame
Nov. 20	Virginia Tech at Miami (Fla.)
Nov. 21	SMU at Notre Dame
Nov. 28	Virginia at Virginia Tech
Nov. 28	South Carolina at Clemson

BOSTON COLLEGE EAGLES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 83 | ACC PREDICTION: 16 | 2025 RECORD: 2-10, 1-7 ACC

OFFENSE Boston College will look to reverse a horrific 2025 season in which head coach Bill O'Brien's squad went 2-10. While the team got hit with an avalanche of major injuries, there were problems up and down the roster.

The Eagles lost two of their key weapons with running back Turbo Richard (Indiana) and wide receiver Reed Harris (Arizona State) leaving via the portal. BC added Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletic Conference Player of the Year QB Mason McKenzie out of Div. II Saginaw Valley State; he is the presumed starting quarterback. Running back Evan Dickens arrives from Liberty, and a half-dozen offensive linemen, many of whom are in position to start, have transferred in.

Tight end Kaelan Chudzinski (24 receptions, 313 yards, four TDs) was a revelation last season, and if he continues to develop, he could become one of the best tight ends in the ACC.

DEFENSE On defense, KP Price, BC's leading defensive player from '25 returns, giving BC a hard-hitting and smart safety who can focus on his position instead of being moved around because of injuries.

The Eagles also did a very solid job rebuilding their edge rusher position in the portal, adding Kris Jones (Georgia) and Demetrius Ballard (Buffalo). O'Brien also turned to the portal to fill his linebacker spots, adding three LBs who figure to get major snaps this year: Bodie Kahoun (Notre Dame), Anthony Palano (Washington State) and Justin Medlock (SMU).

SPECIALISTS The special teams unit returns arguably BC's best player in 2025 — placekicker Luca Lombardo, who connected on 16-of-17 field-goal attempts. FCS Towson transfer Bryce LaFollette is likely to be the starting punter, while starting defensive backs TJ Green and Isaiah Farris are slated for return duties.

FINAL ANALYSIS O'Brien's coaching staff is almost completely revamped, with veteran coach Ted Roof taking the defensive reins and O'Brien and some of his assistants handling offensive play-calling. In all, O'Brien replaced 75% of his positional staff during the offseason.

BC also saw the most active transfer portal period in school history, as 30 players departed, and 28 transfers arrived.

This year could have a host of different outcomes, depending on how the transfers perform. If McKenzie can be a mobile game-changer like Ole Miss star Trinidad Chambliss, to whom O'Brien has compared him, BC could be a surprise team. But if McKenzie struggles, and a new offensive line does not jell, this could be another long season in Chestnut Hill.

2025 RESULTS (2-10, 1-7 ACC)

Aug. 30	Fordham	W	66-10
Sept. 6	at Michigan State (ot)	L	40-42
Sept. 13	at Stanford	L	20-30
Sept. 27	California	L	24-28
Oct. 4	at Pittsburgh	L	7-48
Oct. 11	Clemson	L	10-41
Oct. 18	UConn	L	23-38
Oct. 25	at Louisville	L	24-38
Nov. 1	Notre Dame	L	10-25
Nov. 8	SMU	L	13-45
Nov. 15	Georgia Tech	L	34-36
Nov. 29	at Syracuse	W	34-12

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	at Cincinnati
Sept. 11	Rutgers
Sept. 19	Maine
Sept. 26	Virginia Tech
Oct. 3	at SMU
Oct. 17	Pitt
Oct. 24	at Georgia Tech
Oct. 31	at Duke
Nov. 7	Florida State
Nov. 14	at Notre Dame
Nov. 21	Syracuse
Nov. 28	at Miami (Fla.)

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1. Demeterius Thompson, EDGE ★★★
2. Mason Leak, EDGE ★★★
3. Marcelino Antunes Jr., OT ★★★
4. Femi Babalola, QB ★★★
5. Jordan Rodriguez, S ★★★
6. Gerald Green Jr., CB ★★★
7. Marek Jin, IOL ★★★
8. Steve Klein, LB ★★★
9. Kelvin Brown Jr., WR ★★★
10. DJ Biggins, WR ★★★

**Per Rivals*

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Bill O'Brien • Record at School: 9-16 (2 years) • Career Record: 24-25 (4 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Bill O'Brien
Defensive Coordinator: Ted Roof • Location: Chestnut Hill, Mass. • Stadium: Alumni Stadium (44,500)

KP PRICE

SCOUTING THE EAGLES

"[Bill O'Brien] is an excellent coach. They just don't have any playmakers. When that place has been good, it's always been good quarterback play, and they could run the football, really good tight ends, which they do have one now with Kaelan Chudzinski. He's a really good player, but they don't have a lot of really dynamic playmakers. I know that they brought in a couple of transfers at quarterback, but I don't know if any of them are elite players. ... Zay Flowers is the only receiver that Boston College has had drafted in the last 30 years, but as a recruit, he was a peanut who ended up being an incredible player. They're not gonna out-recruit anyone at receiver. Ever."

— An opposing ACC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (1)

WR	1	Jaedn Skeete (Jr.)	4	Javarius Green* (So.)
WR	3	Dawson Pough (So.)	14	Nedrick Boldin Jr. (Fr.)
WR	8	Johnathan Montague Jr. (So.)	80	Reed Swanson* (Jr.)
LT	75	Pape Abdoulaye Sy (So.)	63	Veguer Jean-Jumeau* (So.)
LG	71	Kristian Phillips* (Sr.)	56	Jani Norwood* (So.)
C	**77**	**MICHAEL CROUNSE (JR.)**	50	Owen Snively* (Sr.)
RG	55	Robert Smith IV (So.)	52	Judah Pruitt (So.)
RT	70	Reggie Jackson* (Jr.)	53	Trevon Humphrey* (Sr.)
TE	85	Kaelan Chudzinski (So.)	87	Cameron Kossman* (Fr.)
QB	10	Mason McKenzie* (Jr.)	15	Grayson Wilson* (Fr.)
RB	23	Evan Dickens* (Jr.)	2	Nolan Ray* (Jr.)

DEFENSE (3)

DE	8	Onye Nwosisi (Sr.)	48	Bryce Lewis (Fr.)
DT	90	KJ Sampson* (Jr.)	59	Micah Amedee (So.)
DT	**6**	**CHRIS MARABLE JR. (JR.)**	55	Christian Hudson* (So.)
DE	4	Kris Jones* (So.)	41	Favor Bate (Jr.)
LB	16	Anthony Palano* (So.)	36	Bodie Kahoun* (Fr.)
LB	20	Justin Medlock* (Sr.)	43	Griffin Collins (So.)
CB	0	TJ Green (So.)	29	Cameron Martinez (Sr.)
CB	3	Max Tucker (Sr.)	14	Ashton Cunningham (So.)
CB	10	Syair Torrence (So.)	19	Marcelous Townsend (Fr.)
S	**2**	**KP PRICE (SR.)**	18	Kameron Howard* (Jr.)
S	**7**	**CARTER DAVIS (JR.)**	5	Marcus Upton (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	99	Luca Lombardo (Sr.)	KR	0	TJ Green (So.)
P		Bryce LaFollette* (Sr.)	PR	1	Isaiah Farris (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

DARREN YAMASHITA-IMAGN IMAGES

JARON-KEAWE SAGAPOLUTELE

SCOUTING THE GOLDEN BEARS

"I think they did a great job with this new staff. They have a great grasp of what they want for the future. It's a great alumni base. With them being able to get [quarterback Jaron-Keawe Sagapolutele] to return, that just shows their commitment to winning. Putting the right players around him, they can make a run in the ACC. I'm not saying they're gonna be able to win the ACC, but they're gonna have a chance to hang around just because of the quarterback play. The guys around him will rise to his level. ... Their recruiting guy, Marshall Cherrington, is as good as they get in the industry. He's incredibly well-respected, a phenomenal evaluator. He's the best networker I've ever been around. He's an absolute superstar in every facet."

— An opposing ACC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)				
WR	9	Ian Strong* (Sr.)	15	Mark Hamper (Jr.)
WR	7	Chase Hendricks* (Sr.)	82	Cole Boscia (Sr.)
WR	10	Cooper Perry* (So.)	19	Trevor Rogers (So.)
LT	77	Jimothy Lewis Jr.* (So.)	54	Frederick Williams III (Jr.)
LG	**71**	**SIOAPE VATIKANI (SR.)**	58	Ashton Rivera* (Jr.)
C	76	Bastian Swinney (Sr.)	78	Lamar Robinson (Sr.)
RG	**56**	**TYSON RUFFINS (JR.)**	78	Lamar Robinson (Sr.)
RT	51	Kahlee Tafai* (Jr.)	75	Jacob Arop* (So.)
TE	0	Dorian Thomas* (Jr.)	**85**	**MASON MINI (JR.)**
QB	**3**	**JARON-KEAWE SAGAPOLUTELE (SO.)**	11	Jackson Brousseau* (Jr.)
RB	24	Adam Mohammed* (Jr.)	20	Ashten Emory* (So.)
DEFENSE (3)				
DE	**98**	**NATE BURRELL (SR.)**	56	Legend Journey (So.)
DT	44	Jericho Johnson* (So.)	99	Ashun Shepphard* (Sr.)
DT	96	Derek Wilkins (Sr.)	94	Stanley Saole-McKenzie (Sr.)
DE	0	Solomon Williams* (So.)	6	Emmanuel Okoye* (So.)
LB	32	Tristan Jernigan* (So.)	4	Justin Beadles* (Sr.)
LB	21	Aaron Hampton (Jr.)	3	Kamar Mothudi* (So.)
CB	1	Ricky Fletcher* (Sr.)	8	Jasiah Wagoner (Jr.)
CB	7	Daniel Harris* (Sr.)	13	Jae'on Young (Fr.)
NB	**20**	**CAM SIDNEY (SR.)**	26	Niles Davis (Fr.)
S	2	Kingston Lopa* (So.)	23	Isaiah Crosby (Jr.)
S	**14**	**AIDEN MANUTAI (SO.)**	16	Michael Hurst Jr.* (Sr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	91	Chase Meyer (Sr.)	KR	19 Trevor Rogers (So.)
P	29	Angus Davies* (Sr.)	PR	7 Chase Hendricks* (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** · *2026 TRANSFER

D. ROSS CAMERON-IMAGN IMAGES

CAL GOLDEN BEARS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 47 | ACC PREDICTION: 10 | 2025 RECORD: 7-6, 4-4 ACC

OFFENSE New Cal head coach Tosh Lupoi left his introductory news conference, flew to Hawai'i, convinced star quarterback Jaron-Keawe Sagapolutele to return and then flew back, without changing clothes. Lupoi has a potential centerpiece in JKS, and he's not taking him for granted.

The Bears are building around Sagapolutele with gifted wide receivers, tight ends and running backs while working to upgrade the offensive line. Cal added second-team All-MAC wideout Chase Hendricks (Ohio), productive Rutgers receiver Ian Strong and New Mexico's Dorian Thomas, a first-team All-Mountain West selection who ranked among the nation's top-10 tight ends for receptions (56) and receiving yards (560).

Cal has depth at tight end with returning starter Mason Mini, Purdue transfer Rico Walker and others. Washington transfer Adam Mohammed, who rushed for 105 yards against Lupoi's Oregon defense in 2025, headlines a transfer-heavy running back room.

The line returns experience in the interior with Tyson Ruffins and Sioape Vatikani, and Cal has supplemented with transfers, as Jimothy Lewis Jr. (Mississippi State), Kahlee Tafai (Minnesota) and others arrive.

DEFENSE Lupoi and the defensive staff have work ahead to transform body types, including adding length up front. Veterans Nate Burrell and Derek Wilkins return, and tackle Jericho Johnson is among those who joined Lupoi from Oregon. Cal also is banking on potential with edge transfers Solomon Williams (Texas A&M) and Emmanuel Okoye (Tennessee).

Linebacker is a question as first-team All-ACC selection Cade Uluave and Luke Ferrelli, the ACC Defensive Freshman of the Year, both transferred. Aaron Hampton and Jayden Wayne are back, but Cal will need to fill out the depth chart with transfers like Texas A&M's Tristan Jernigan.

Cal's secondary has a new look, but "we upgraded dramatically there, as far as size-speed combo," Lupoi says. The length shows up at cornerback with 6-foot-3 Ole Miss transfer Ricky Fletcher, 6-foot-3 Georgia transfer Daniel Harris and others. Nickel Cam Sidney returns from 2025.

SPECIALISTS Chase Meyer is back after connecting on 10-of-13 field goals, including 7-of-7 inside 40 yards. Cal added punter Angus Davies from Tulsa in the portal. Jacob De Jesus will be missed on returns, and special teams coordinator Zach Tinker likely will lean on Hendricks and others.

FINAL ANALYSIS Lupoi and general manager Ron Rivera bring a pedal-down personnel approach that Cal needs. If Sagapolutele gets better protection, he could lead one of the ACC's better passing attacks. Cal lost key back-end players on defense and must generally get better along both lines of scrimmage, but the future looks bright.

2025 RESULTS (7-6, 4-4 ACC)

Aug. 30	at Oregon State	W	34-15
Sept. 6	Texas Southern	W	35-3
Sept. 13	Minnesota	W	27-14
Sept. 20	at San Diego State	L	0-34
Sept. 27	at Boston College	W	28-24
Oct. 4	Duke	L	21-45
Oct. 17	North Carolina	W	21-18
Oct. 24	at Virginia Tech (ot)	L	34-42
Nov. 1	Virginia	L	21-31
Nov. 8	at Louisville (ot)	W	29-26
Nov. 22	at Stanford	L	10-31
Nov. 29	SMU	W	38-35
Dec. 24	vs. Hawai'i #	L	31-35

#Hawai'i Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept.	5	UCLA
Sept.	12	at Syracuse
Sept.	19	Wagner
Sept.	25	Clemson
Oct.	3	at UNLV
Oct.	10	Virginia Tech
Oct.	17	Wake Forest
Oct.	24	at SMU
Oct.	31	at NC State
Nov.	14	at Virginia
Nov.	21	Stanford
Nov.	28	Pitt

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Taimane Purcell, TE	★★★★
2.	Daniel McMorris, OT	★★★
3.	EJ Morgan, WR	★★★
4.	Nainoa Lopes, QB	★★★
5.	Victor Santino, RB	★★★
6.	Jaxon Pyatt, LB	★★★
7.	Elisha Faamatuainu, IOL	★★★
8.	Kamo'i Huihui-White, IOL	★★★
9.	JD McKinley, LB	★★★
10.	Nemyah Telona, DL	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Tosh Lupoi • Record at School: First Season • Career Record: First Season • Offensive Coordinators: Jordan Somerville, Ike Hilliard Defensive Coordinators: Michael Hutchings, Da'Von Brown • Location: Berkeley, Calif. Stadium: California Memorial Stadium (63,000)

CLEMSON TIGERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 27 | ACC PREDICTION: 4 | 2025 RECORD: 7-6, 4-4 ACC

OFFENSE Quarterback Christopher Vizzina spent three years as Cade Klubnik's backup. Now, the former top-100 recruit from Alabama is the favorite to start in 2026. Vizzina has limited experience (105 career pass attempts), but he was solid in his first career start last season vs. SMU. If Vizzina struggles, Clemson could turn to true freshman Tait Reynolds.

At wide receiver, juniors T.J. Moore and Bryant Wesco Jr. are both future pros and lead a deep, talented group. Gideon Davidson and SMU transfer Chris Johnson Jr. provide a strong 1-2 punch at running back, and Clemson has good options at tight end, led by Olsen Patt-Henry.

The Tigers must replace three of their five primary offensive line starters from last year. The unit as a whole is seeking more consistency and explosiveness under Chad Morris, who's back for his second stint as Clemson's offensive coordinator after a successful run from 2011-14.

DEFENSE Transfers are the name of the game for Clemson's defense, which will enter 2026 with a seven portal players on the defense's two-deep. Their job? Add competitive depth and speed to a Tigers defense that didn't have enough talent across the board last year.

Players like Elliot Washington II (Penn State), London Merritt (Colorado), Corey Myrick (Southern Miss) and Jerome Carter III (Old Dominion) should see immediate reps for Clemson, which lost seven 2025 defensive starters to either the NFL Draft or the transfer portal.

Junior linebacker Sammy Brown and senior defensive end Will Heldt — a former Purdue transfer who turned down a draft opportunity to come back to Clemson — are the unit's top returners.

SPECIALISTS Clemson returns starting placekicker Nolan Hauser and starting punter Jack Smith. Last year's top kickoff returner and punt returner both graduated, though, so expect competition at both spots.

FINAL ANALYSIS Last year was supposed to be epic for head coach Dabo Swinney's program. Instead, a team that returned almost everyone from its 2024 ACC championship and College Football Playoff team fell flat on its face, started 3-5 and limped to 7-6, Swinney's worst record since 2010.

Clemson's longtime coach responded by making multiple staff changes and using the portal more than ever. But Swinney's decision to stick with Vizzina and not pursue a transfer QB is a significant gamble ahead of what feels like a "prove-it" year for a program at a crossroads.

Clemson is just 26-14 overall (.650) and 15-9 in the ACC (.640) since 2023. That's a noticeable drop-off for a school that lost seven games *total* from 2015-20. Big games against LSU, Miami (Fla.) and South Carolina will be gut-checks.

2025 RESULTS (7-6, 4-4 ACC)

Aug. 30	LSU	L	10-17
Sept. 6	Troy	W	27-16
Sept. 13	at Georgia Tech	L	21-24
Sept. 20	Syracuse	L	21-34
Oct. 4	at North Carolina	W	38-10
Oct. 11	at Boston College	W	41-10
Oct. 18	SMU	L	24-35
Nov. 1	Duke	L	45-46
Nov. 8	Florida State	W	24-10
Nov. 14	at Louisville	W	20-19
Nov. 22	Furman	W	45-10
Nov. 29	at South Carolina	W	28-14
Dec. 27	vs. Penn State #	L	10-22

#Pinstripe Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	at LSU
Sept. 12	Georgia Southern
Sept. 19	North Carolina
Sept. 25	at Cal
Oct. 3	Miami (Fla.)
Oct. 17	Charleston Southern
Oct. 24	Virginia Tech
Oct. 31	at Florida State
Nov. 7	at Syracuse
Nov. 14	Georgia Tech
Nov. 21	at Duke
Nov. 28	South Carolina

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Naeem Burroughs, WR	★★★★
2.	Polo Anderson, S	★★★★
3.	Gordon Sellars III, WR	★★★★
4.	Brayden Reilly, LB	★★★★
5.	Chance Barclay, IOL	★★★★
6.	Connor Salmin, WR	★★★★
7.	Grant Wise, IOL	★★★★
8.	Leo Delaney, IOL	★★★
9.	Carter Scruggs, IOL	★★★
10.	Adam Guthrie, OT	★★★

*Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Dabo Swinney • Record at School: 187-53 (17+ years)
Career Record: 187-53 (17+ years) • Offensive Coordinator: Chad Morris
Defensive Coordinator: Tom Allen • Location: Clemson, S.C.
Stadium: Memorial Stadium (81,500)

T.J. MOORE

SCOUTING THE TIGERS

"It's almost like they overcoach their defensive players instead of letting them cut it loose and play. There were some schematic things where you felt like you could get them out of position. Usually, teams that are really talented do a little less and try to just let those guys cut it loose. ... Their backup QBs didn't play much last year, and I didn't think they were very good. I'd be shocked if they were better on offense even if they're coached better. When Clemson is good, their quarterback is really good. ... The same concepts that they ran in 2025, you can go back to the beginning when Dabo [Swinney] got there and see the same thing. I don't think it was [offensive coordinator] Garrett Riley's offense. It was essentially Chad Morris' offense being called by Garrett Riley."

— An opposing ACC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)

WR	12	**BRYANT WESCO JR. (JR.)**	22	Cole Turner (Jr.)
WR	1	**T.J. MOORE (JR.)**	19	Gordon Sellars III (Fr.)
WR	6	Tyler Brown (Jr.)	0	Naeem Burroughs (Fr.)
LT	74	Brayden Jacobs (So.)	54	Ian Reed (So.)
LG	52	Elyjah Thurmon (So.)	77	Ronan O'Connell (So.)
C	55	**HARRIS SEWELL (SR.)**	64	Grant Wise (Fr.)
RG	50	**COLLIN SADLER (SR.)**	75	Tucker Kattus (Fr.)
RT	63	Easton Ware (Fr.)	76	Mason Wade (So.)
TE	11	**OLSEN PATT-HENRY (SR.)**	87	Christian Bentancur (So.)
QB	17	Christopher Vizzina (Jr.)	2	Tait Reynolds (Fr.)
RB	8	Gideon Davidson (So.)	16	Chris Johnson Jr.* (Jr.)

DEFENSE (3)

DE	13	**WILL HELDT (SR.)**	17	Ari Watford (Fr.)
DT	99	Markus Strong* (Jr.)		Andy Burburija* (Jr.)
DT	45	Vic Burley (Jr.)	29	Champ Thompson (So.)
DE	15	Jahiem Lawson (Sr.)	14	London Merritt* (So.)
MLB	47	**SAMMY BROWN (JR.)**	7	Jeremiah Alexander (Sr.)
WLB	21	Kobe McCloud (Jr.)	50	Fletcher Cothran (Sr.)
CB	2	**ASHTON HAMPTON (JR.)**	0	Donovan Starr* (So.)
CB	3	Elliot Washington II* (Sr.)	1	Branden Strozier (Jr.)
NB	8	Corian Gipson (So.)	10	Misun Kelley (Jr.)
S	22	Corey Myrick* (Jr.)	5	Ronan Hanafin (Sr.)
S	6	Jerome Carter III* (Jr.)	11	Polo Anderson (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	81	Nolan Hauser (Jr.)	KR	8	Gideon Davidson (So.)
P	89	Jack Smith (Sr.)	PR	6	Tyler Brown (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

KEN RUINARD - GREENVILLE NEWS-USA TODAY NETWORK VIA IMAGN IMAGES

NATE SHEPPARD

ZACHARY TAFT-IMAGN IMAGES

SCOUTING THE BLUE DEVILS

"What's so tough in this era is the timing of when Duke lost [quarterback Darian Mensah] to Miami. There's no way that they thought they were going to lose him. So they didn't replace him or get someone comparable because why would someone comparable come while he's there? That's a tough blow. ... But the culture, the belief and the mindset are there at that place right now. One of the best things that Manny Diaz did when he became head coach was making sure he retained Dave Feeley, the head strength coach, and not lose him to Texas A&M. From a toughness, physicality and stability standpoint for them, that culture starts in the weight room."

— An opposing ACC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)

WR		Jared Richardson* (Sr.)	19	Kavon Simmons (Fr.)
WR	8	Jayden Moore (So.)	6	Jamien Little (Fr.)
WR	5	Javen Nicholas* (Sr.)	4	Jaivon Solomon (Fr.)
LT	56	Nick Del Grande* (Sr.)	66	Caleb Dorris (Jr.)
LG	64	**JORDAN LARSEN (SR.)**	74	Reagan McCranie (Jr.)
C	72	**MATT CRAYCRAFT (SR.)**	55	Ryan Daly (So.)
RG	63	Bradley Smith (So.)	76	Gemyel Allen (So.)
RT	75	Micah Sahakian (Sr.)	77	Braden Miller* (Sr.)
TE	85	**JEREMIAH HASLEY (SR.)**	15	Jake Taylor (Sr.)
QB	2	Walker Eget* (Sr.)	10	Dan Mahan (Fr.)
RB	20	**NATE SHEPPARD (SO.)**	0	CJ Campbell Jr.* (Sr.)

DEFENSE (3)

VYPER	10	Tyshon Reed (Jr.)	43	Semaj Turner (So.)
NT	44	David Anderson (Jr.)	55	Julius Columbus (Fr.)
DT	95	Preston Watson (Jr.)	99	Dakota Quiñonez* (Sr.)
DE	14	Bryce Davis (So.)	15	Kevin O'Connor (Jr.)
MLB	34	**LUKE MERGOTT (JR.)**	36	Nick Morris Jr. (Sr.)
WLB	42	Kendall Johnson (Jr.)	24	Bradley Gompers (So.)
STAR	30	Will Felder Jr. (Fr.)	31	Elliott Schaper (So.)
CB	21	Landan Callahan (So.)	28	Kaleb Lanier (Fr.)
CB	5	**KIMARI ROBINSON (JR.)**	0	Dylan Flowers* (Sr.)
ROVER	8	**DASHAWN STONE (JR.)**	6	Leon Griffin III (Jr.)
FS		Patrick Smith-Young* (Sr.)		Ché Ojarikre* (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	39	Cosme Salas (So.)	KR	8 Jayden Moore (So.)
P	41	Kade Reynoldson (Jr.)	PR	20 Nate Sheppard (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

DUKE BLUE DEVILS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 54 | ACC PREDICTION: 13 | 2025 RECORD: 9-5, 6-2 ACC

OFFENSE The ACC's top scoring offense (34.6 ppg) propelled Duke to its first ACC championship since 1989. A quarterback change necessitated by Darian Mensah's controversial last-minute portal move to Miami (Fla.) and Walker Eget's arrival from San José State could make that level of production more difficult to attain. Eget completed 59% of his passes last season, throwing for 3,051 yards with 17 touchdowns and nine interceptions. Those numbers don't quite match Mensah's. But given the circumstances, the Blue Devils are in decent shape there.

Duke retained running back Nate Sheppard, who turned in a fabulous freshman season with 1,132 rushing yards and 11 touchdowns. He'll run behind an offensive line that returns two starters — left guard Jordan Larsen and center Matt Craycraft. Right tackle Micah Sahakian is back after missing last season with an injury. Coastal Carolina transfer Nick Del Grande, a two-time All-Sun Belt pick, slots in at left tackle.

Duke will count on FCS Penn transfer Jared Richardson, a 1,000-yard receiver last season, to start.

DEFENSE Though head coach Manny Diaz is known for his defensive prowess, the Blue Devils won the ACC despite finishing in the bottom half of the league in scoring defense (29.4 ppg, 14th) and total defense (424.2 ypg, 15th). Duke needs a host of reserves to step into starting roles.

Up front, David Anderson, Preston Watson and Tyshod Reed will get opportunities. Senior linebacker Nick Morris Jr. is returning from a torn ACL, and Duke needs more contributions from Luke Mergott, who stepped in and made big plays last season.

The secondary needs transfers Dylan Flowers (WKU), Evan Smith (Northwestern) and Patrick Smith-Young (North Texas) to jell quickly with returners Landon Callahan and DaShawn Stone.

SPECIALISTS Cosme Salas, Duke's kickoff specialist as a freshman last season, steps into full placekicking duties as a sophomore. His leg is strong, but he needs to prove he's accurate as well. Duke has one of the ACC's better punters in Kade Reynoldson, who averaged 44.6 yards per attempt as a sophomore. Sheppard could bring explosiveness as a punt returner, and the same goes for wide receiver Jayden Moore on kickoffs.

FINAL ANALYSIS Duke reached an impressive milestone with its ACC championship. Still, the Blue Devils lost five regular-season games, making the title game as a result of a series of tiebreakers. It looks unlikely that the offense will match last season's production, which means the defense needs to improve. So many new faces could make that difficult.

2025 RESULTS (9-5, 6-2 ACC)

Aug. 28	Elon	W	45-17
Sept. 6	Illinois	L	19-45
Sept. 13	at Tulane	L	27-34
Sept. 20	NC State	W	45-33
Sept. 27	at Syracuse	W	38-3
Oct. 4	at Cal	W	45-21
Oct. 18	Georgia Tech	L	18-27
Nov. 1	at Clemson	W	46-45
Nov. 8	at UConn	L	34-37
Nov. 15	Virginia	L	17-34
Nov. 22	at North Carolina	W	32-25
Nov. 29	Wake Forest	W	49-32
Dec. 6	vs. Virginia # (ot)	W	27-20
Dec. 31	vs. Arizona State %	W	42-39

#Charlotte, NC Sun Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	Tulane
Sept. 12	at Illinois
Sept. 19	Stanford
Sept. 26	William & Mary
Oct. 10	at Georgia Tech
Oct. 17	North Carolina
Oct. 24	at Virginia
Oct. 31	Boston College
Nov. 7	at NC State
Nov. 14	at Miami (Fla.)
Nov. 21	Clemson
Nov. 28	at Wake Forest

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Obinna Umeh, EDGE	★★★★
2.	CJ Givers, RB	★★★
3.	Terry Walker III, QB	★★★
4.	Lyrik Pettis, S	★★★
5.	Benjamin Moseley, TE	★★★
6.	Sean Stover, IOL	★★★
7.	Chadwicke Cannon Jr., DL	★★★
8.	Brody Keefe, WR	★★★
9.	Tyson Sanford, CB	★★★
10.	Jayvian Tanelus, RB	★★★

*Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Manny Diaz • Record at School: 18-9 (2 years)
Career Record: 39-24 (5 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Jonathan Brewer
Defensive Coordinator: Jonathan Patke • Location: Durham, N.C.
Stadium: Wallace Wade Stadium (35,018)

FLORIDA STATE SEMINOLES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 48 | ACC PREDICTION: 11 | 2025 RECORD: 5-7, 2-6 ACC

OFFENSE Florida State is breaking in a new starting quarterback for the third consecutive season and is tasked with replacing its entire offensive line for the second straight year. Transfer quarterback Ashton Daniels has been inconsistent throughout his college career, but he had some promising flashes in limited action at Auburn in 2025.

The Seminoles do bring some promising playmakers to the table. Duce Robinson and Micahi Danzy could blossom into one of the best wide receiver duos in the country. Robinson is coming off a 1,000-yard season, while Danzy's explosiveness leaves opposing defenses in the dust.

FSU has a three-headed monster at running back with Texas transfer Quintrevion Wisner joining Ousmane Kromah and Samuel Singleton Jr. It's a group that will give opposing defenses fits.

DEFENSE The Seminoles revamped their defense over the offseason, bringing in multiple transfers to fortify the unit. The added talent in the middle will help shore up a weakness from a year ago. Southern Miss transfer Chris Jones was among the top-10 tacklers in the FBS in 2025, and North Carolina transfer Mikai Gbayor has previous experience playing under defensive coordinator Tony White when both were at Nebraska.

Florida State has questions in the trenches, although the team did retain twin defensive linemen Darryll and Desir Mandrell. Daniel Lyons has grown into a leader in the middle. Rylan Kennedy (Texas A&M) was the only defensive end the Seminoles added through the transfer portal.

On the back end, cornerback Ja'Bril Rawls and rover Ashlynd Barker are two crucial pieces to the success of the unit.

SPECIALISTS This unit is relatively unknown, as former Oklahoma State kicker Gabe Panikowski and former New Mexico punter Daniel Hughes transferred to Tallahassee, along with North Dakota State long-snapper Caleb Bowers. The options in the return game are intriguing, with dynamic threats such as Singleton, Danzy, Jasen Lopez and Devin Carter.

FINAL ANALYSIS Head coach Mike Norvell enters his seventh season at Florida State firmly on the hot seat. The Seminoles have missed the postseason four times in the past six years and are just 7-18 overall since being infamously snubbed from the College Football Playoff after the 2023 regular season. The schedule does Norvell no favors. FSU faces Alabama in Tuscaloosa after hosting SMU on Labor Day. There is also a pair of two-game road trips to grapple with, and it's been more than two years since the program won outside of Doak Campbell Stadium.

In the end, Florida State's lack of urgency to invest in a top quarterback transfer will likely come back to bite Norvell, who might be gearing up for his final chance to right the ship.

2025 RESULTS (5-7, 2-6 ACC)

Aug. 30	Alabama	W	31-17
Sept. 6	East Texas A&M	W	77-3
Sept. 20	Kent State	W	66-10
Sept. 26	at Virginia (ot)	L	38-46
Oct. 4	Miami (Fla.)	L	22-28
Oct. 11	Pitt	L	31-34
Oct. 18	at Stanford	L	13-20
Nov. 1	Wake Forest	W	42-7
Nov. 8	at Clemson	L	10-24
Nov. 15	Virginia Tech	W	34-14
Nov. 21	at NC State	L	11-21
Nov. 29	at Florida	L	21-40

2026 SCHEDULE

Aug. 29	New Mexico State
Sept. 7	SMU
Sept. 19	at Alabama
Sept. 26	Central Arkansas
Oct. 3	Virginia
Oct. 9	at Louisville
Oct. 17	at Miami (Fla.)
Oct. 31	Clemson
Nov. 7	at Boston College
Nov. 13	at Pitt
Nov. 21	NC State
Nov. 27	Florida

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Izayia Williams, LB	★★★★
2.	Earnest Rankins, DL	★★★★
3.	Chuck Kennon, CB	★★★★
4.	Jaemin Pinckney, EDGE	★★★★
5.	Amari Thomas, RB	★★★★
6.	Jasen Lopez, WR	★★★★
7.	Tre Bell III, S	★★★★
8.	EJ White, ATH	★★★★
9.	Jordan Crutchfield, S	★★★
10.	Karon Maycock, LB	★★★

*Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Mike Norvell • Record at School: 38-34 (6 years) • Career Record: 76-49 (10 years) • Offensive Coordinators: Mike Norvell, Tim Harris Jr. • Defensive Coordinator: Tony White • Location: Tallahassee, Fla. • Stadium: Doak Campbell Stadium (67,277)

DUCE ROBINSON

SCOUTING THE SEMINOLES

"They don't have the booster support that people might think that they do. The volatility with [head coach] Mike Norvell is something that I've never seen. Norvell is a really good coach, but one of the hardest things in football is fighting complacency. I think once things started going well, they gave in an inch here and there, then you look back in a year and you see that you gave up a mile. ... They can reinvent themselves and be who they set out to be. But can they do it consistently and not just a flash in the pan? With a new group of people and some new coaches, I think it can be reversed. The players have to take charge of that."

— An opposing ACC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (2)

WR	0	**DUCE ROBINSON (SR.)**	13	Tae'Shaun Gelsey (Fr.)
WR	8	**MICAHI DANZY (SO.)**	11	Devin Carter (Fr.)
WR	15	Jayvan Boggs (So.)	7	Jasen Lopez (Fr.)
LT	77	Xavier Chaplin* (Sr.)	74	Jonathan Daniels (So.)
LG	65	André Otto (Jr.)	78	Jayden Todd (So.)
C	55	Bradyn Joiner* (Jr.)	52	Chavez Thompson (Fr.)
RG	71	Nate Pabst* (Sr.)	51	Paul Bowling* (So.)
RT	79	Chimdia Nwaiwu* (Jr.)	71	Nate Pabst* (Sr.)
TE	6	Desirrio Riles* (Sr.)	18	Landen Thomas (Jr.)
QB	14	Ashton Daniels* (Sr.)	9	Kevin Sperry (Fr.)
RB	5	Quintrevion Wisner* (Sr.)	32	Ousmane Kromah (So.)

DEFENSE (4)

JACK	15	Rylan Kennedy* (Sr.)	32	Jalen Anderson (Jr.)
NT	5	**DANIEL LYONS (SR.)**	55	Kevin Wynn (Fr.)
DT	8	Deante McCray (Sr.)	3	Mandrell Desir (So.)
DE	1	Darryll Desir (So.)	13	Deamontae Diggs (Sr.)
MLB	10	Chris Jones* (Jr.)	28	Mikai Gbayor* (Sr.)
LB	20	**BLAKE NICHELSON (SR.)**	9	Omar Graham Jr. (Sr.)
CB	6	**JA'BRIL RAWLS (JR.)**	12	Nehemiah Chandler* (So.)
CB	0	Quindarrius Jones (Sr.)	4	Charles Lester III (So.)
ROVER	7	**ASHLYND BARKER (SR.)**	37	Tre Bell III (Fr.)
S	11	CJ Richard Jr.* (So.)	24	K.J. Kirkland (Jr.)
S	14	Ma'Khi Jones* (So.)	16	Karson Hobbs* (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	39	Gabe Panikowski* (Sr.)	KR	3	Samuel Singleton Jr. (Jr.)
P	36	Daniel Hughes* (Jr.)	PR	7	Jasen Lopez (Fr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

MELINA MYERS-IMAGN IMAGES

MALACHI HOSLEY

GEORGIA TECH YELLOW JACKETS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 41 | ACC PREDICTION: 8 | 2025 RECORD: 9-4, 6-2 ACC

OFFENSE Georgia Tech will have a new offensive coordinator, former Jackets quarterback and veteran NFL assistant George Godsey, and a new quarterback, with Haynes King graduating after three years as the starter. The Jackets will likely return to a more run-heavy, ball-control type of system, as head coach Brent Key wants a tough, physical brand of football.

Filling King's shoes will be a tough assignment, but transfer Alberto Mendoza is expected to get the first shot following a year spent backing up his brother, 2025 Heisman Trophy winner Fernando, at Indiana.

Tech made its biggest portal splash at running back with the acquisition of Justice Haynes, who has shown dynamic playmaking ability during stints at Alabama and Michigan. He will pair with Malachi Hosley, who led Jackets RBs last year with 697 rushing yards.

Attrition hit the wide receiver and tight end positions hard. Speedy Jordan Allen returns with higher expectations after a solid true freshman campaign at WR, and FCS Elon transfer Isaiah Fuhrmann is a bigger-bodied target. At tight end, several transfers will fill key roles in an offense that uses the position in a variety of ways.

The offensive line will have three new starters along with returnees Ethan Mackenny at left tackle and Malachi Carney, who is expected to move to guard after starting at right tackle in 2025.

DEFENSE New defensive coordinator Jason Semore will emphasize aggressiveness and takeaways after the unit struggled to force turnovers (nine) and get to the quarterback (13 sacks) in 2025.

The line lost several key contributors, but the coaching staff made it a priority to build depth and emphasize size in the portal. Linebackers Kyle Efford and E.J. Lightsey return as the two top tacklers from 2025, but in a new system, the pair will likely have to earn their spots again.

Question marks fill the back end following the loss to graduation of two starters at corner and two starters at safety. Transfers Jaylen Mbakwe and Jonas Duclona should step in at corner, while returning safeties Tae Harris and Fenix Felton look to take their games to a new level.

SPECIALISTS The Jackets return one of the best placekickers in the country in Aidan Birr, who had multiple clutch field goals in 2025. The punting situation will be a battle between an incoming transfer, a freshman and a walk-on. There are multiple talented playmakers in the return game.

FINAL ANALYSIS The roster is much younger, the Jackets have new coordinators and multiple new assistants and the schedule appears to be tougher. Key and his staff have done a good job filling holes in the roster, but how it all comes together is the million-dollar question.

SCOUTING THE YELLOW JACKETS

"I'm most interested in how it's going to look without [quarterback] Haynes King and [offensive coordinator] Buster Faulkner. Those two hid a lot of deficiencies within that program. Single-handedly as a player and single-handedly as a play-caller, they affected games more than talent or culture. I don't know that they would've been more than average without those two people. Now they're on their fourth defensive coordinator in four years. I would imagine that's a cause for concern. ... [Michigan transfer running back] Justice Haynes is a f—ing savage. I saw him hit a guy and it was like two cars hitting each other. Great balance, great vision. Such a physical back. I think he's going to be a big-time NFL back."

— An opposing ACC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (2)

WR	4	Jordan Allen (So.)	14	Dalen Penson (So.)
WR	13	Isaiah Fuhrmann* (Jr.)	16	Jaiven Plummer* (Sr.)
LT	**78**	**ETHAN MACKENNY (JR.)**	79	Jordan Floyd (So.)
LG	52	Kevin Peay Jr. (Fr.)	65	Courtney Heard (Fr.)
C	69	Joseph Ionata* (So.)	66	Will Reed (Sr.)
RG	**72**	**MALACHI CARNEY (SR.)**	62	Courtlin Heard (Fr.)
RT	70	Jameson Riggs (So.)	71	Markell Samuel* (Sr.)
TE	17	Chris Corbo* (Sr.)	44	Spencer Mermans* (Jr.)
TE/HB	8	Gavin Harris* (Sr.)	86	Kevin Roche Jr. (Fr.)
QB	15	Alberto Mendoza* (So.)	9	Grady Adamson (Fr.)
RB	22	Justice Haynes* (Sr.)	0	Malachi Hosley (Sr.)

DEFENSE (5)

DE	10	Jordan Walker* (Sr.)	**88**	**A.J. HOFFLER (SR.)**
NT	99	Vincent Carroll-Jackson* (Jr.)	92	Christian Speakman (Fr.)
DT	95	Tawfiq Thomas* (Sr.)	55	Christian Garrett (Fr.)
DE	**9**	**AMONTRAE BRADFORD (JR.)**	91	Andre Fuller Jr. (So.)
LB	**44**	**KYLE EFFORD (SR.)**	1	Cayman Spaulding (Sr.)
LB	**2**	**E.J. LIGHTSEY (SR.)**	45	Melvin Jordan IV (Sr.)
CB	3	Jaylen Mbakwe* (Jr.)	4	Daiquan White (Sr.)
CB	29	Jonas Duclona* (Jr.)	**5**	**ZACHARY TOBE (SR.)**
NB	16	Kelvin Hill (Jr.)	28	Elgin Sessions (So.)
S	27	Tae Harris (So.)	32	Jayden Barr (Fr.)
S	13	Savion Riley (Sr.)	31	Fenix Felton (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	33	Aidan Birr (Sr.)	KR	24	Shane Marshall (So.)
P		Alex Bacchetta* (Sr.)	PR	3	Jaylen Mbakwe* (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** · *2026 TRANSFER

NATHAN RAY SEEBECK-IMAGN IMAGES

2025 RESULTS (9-4, 6-2 ACC)

Aug. 29	at Colorado	W	27-20
Sept. 6	Gardner-Webb	W	59-12
Sept. 13	Clemson	W	24-21
Sept. 20	Temple	W	45-24
Sept. 27	at Wake Forest (ot)	W	30-29
Oct. 11	Virginia Tech	W	35-20
Oct. 18	at Duke	W	27-18
Oct. 25	Syracuse	W	41-16
Nov. 1	at NC State	L	36-48
Nov. 15	at Boston College	W	36-34
Nov. 22	Pitt	L	28-42
Nov. 28	Georgia	L	9-16
Dec. 27	vs. BYU #	L	21-25

#Pop-Tarts Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 3	Colorado
Sept. 12	Tennessee
Sept. 19	Mercer
Sept. 26	at Stanford
Oct. 10	Duke
Oct. 17	at Virginia Tech
Oct. 24	Boston College
Oct. 31	at Pitt
Nov. 7	Louisville
Nov. 14	at Clemson
Nov. 21	Wake Forest
Nov. 28	at Georgia

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Trae Stevenson Jr., CB	★★★★
2.	Cole Bergeron, QB	★★★★
3.	Darnell Collins, ATH	★★★★
4.	Amier Clarke, DL	★★★★
5.	Jaedyn Terry, CB	★★★
6.	Kealan Jones, S	★★★
7.	Courtney Heard, OT	★★★
8.	Braylon Outlaw, LB	★★★
9.	Kentrell Davis, WR	★★★
10.	Jack Richerson, TE	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Brent Key • Record at School: 27-20 (3+ years)
Career Record: 27-20 (3+ years) • Offensive Coordinators: George Godsey, Chris Weinke • Defensive Coordinator: Jason Semore • Location: Atlanta, Ga.
Stadium: Bobby Dodd Stadium (51,913)

LOUISVILLE CARDINALS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 23 | ACC PREDICTION: 3 | 2025 RECORD: 9-4, 4-4 ACC

OFFENSE Head coach Jeff Brohm has brought several transfer quarterbacks to Louisville, but none quite like Lincoln Kienholz. Kienholz made only seven appearances in three seasons at Ohio State, despite pushing Julian Sayin for the starting job in 2025. He also provides mobility to complement All-ACC running back Isaac Brown. "Lincoln gives us a dimension we have not had," Brohm says. "He's a really good athlete. He's got a good arm. He just doesn't have the game experience, but he has a ton of talent."

Louisville added FCS West Georgia transfer Davin Wydner to compete with Kienholz. The team retained Brown after a portal scare, but the Cardinals will be rebuilding at wide receiver after losing their top three targets. Louisville added potential impact transfers in Tre Richardson (Vanderbilt) and Lawayne McCoy (Florida State), as well as tight end Brody Foley (Tulsa). "I would like to be more explosive in the passing game," Brohm says.

The line is also transfer-heavy, with guard Eryx Daugherty (Boston College) and center Evan Wibberley (Kentucky) among the additions.

DEFENSE Louisville invested greatly along its defensive line and has depth on the edges with All-ACC selection Clev Lubin, North Carolina transfer Tyler Thompson and others. A key will be bolstering the interior with transfers like Purdue's Demeco Kennedy.

Linebackers T.J. Capers and Antonio Watts combined for 88 tackles (9.5 for a loss). Stanquan Clark, the team's second-leading tackler in 2024, is back following an injury-shortened 2025 season.

The Cardinals went transfer hunting in the secondary, plucking a rare established Iowa defender in safety Koen Entringer, a captain with 73 tackles for the Hawkeyes last season. "He's really good, he's smart, he's experienced," Brohm says of Entringer. Cornerback Tayon Holloway returns after recording two interceptions and five pass breakups.

SPECIALISTS There's competition at placekicker between local standout Carson Hilbert and veteran Nick Keller, while FCS Eastern Kentucky transfer Jacob Baker arrives at punter. Transfer receivers Richardson and Jackson Voth are among those with experience on returns.

FINAL ANALYSIS Brohm will try to fast-track Kienholz and a new-look group of receivers while leaning on Brown and emphasizing line-of-scrimmage play. Louisville has a challenging opener against Ole Miss in Nashville but doesn't play Miami (Fla.) or Virginia. "We've gained some quality personnel, we've got the right mix of youth and experience," Brohm says. "Now it's just a matter of piecing it together."

2025 RESULTS (9-4, 4-4 ACC)

Aug. 30	Eastern Kentucky	W	51-17
Sept. 5	James Madison	W	28-14
Sept. 20	Bowling Green	W	40-17
Sept. 27	at Pitt	W	34-27
Oct. 4	Virginia (ot)	L	27-30
Oct. 17	at Miami (Fla.)	W	24-21
Oct. 25	Boston College	W	38-24
Nov. 1	at Virginia Tech	W	28-16
Nov. 8	Cal (ot)	L	26-29
Nov. 14	Clemson	L	19-20
Nov. 22	at SMU	L	6-38
Nov. 29	Kentucky	W	41-0
Dec. 23	vs. Toledo #	W	27-22

#Boca Raton Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 6	vs. Ole Miss #
Sept. 11	Villanova
Sept. 19	SMU
Sept. 26	Wake Forest
Oct. 3	at NC State
Oct. 9	Florida State
Oct. 17	at Syracuse
Oct. 31	Stanford
Nov. 7	at Georgia Tech
Nov. 14	at North Carolina
Nov. 21	Pitt
Nov. 28	at Kentucky

#Nashville, TN

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Jaydin Broadnax, CB	★★★★
2.	Julius Miles, TE	★★★★
3.	Briggs Cherry, QB	★★★★
4.	Jarvis Strickland, OT	★★★
5.	Jordan Vann, S	★★★
6.	Payton Cook, WR	★★★
7.	Lekhy Thompkins, RB	★★★
8.	Taj Powell, LB	★★★
9.	Gavin Waddell, WR	★★★
10.	Charlie Edgeworth, OT	★★★

*Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Jeff Brohm • Record at School: 28-12 (3 years)
Career Record: 94-56 (12 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Brian Brohm
Defensive Coordinators: Steve Ellis, Mark Ivey • Location: Louisville, Ky.
Stadium: L&N Federal Credit Union Stadium (60,800)

ISAAC BROWN

SCOUTING THE CARDINALS

"They got a good portal quarterback. [Ohio State transfer quarterback Lincoln Kienholz] is gonna be better than what people anticipate. They'll be decent, but overall, there's a little less excitement in the program than there was two years ago. ... I think the [Louisville general manager] Vince Marrow deal is weird, and my guess is that it won't go well in the long run. Just from player evaluation and getting the right players, I don't know that he and [Louisville head coach Jeff Brohm] totally see eye to eye with that. Long term, is that the guy to hitch your wagon to? I don't know. Losing their offensive line coach [Richard Owens], who was really good and ended up at Alabama, that's a big loss for them."

— An opposing ACC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)

WR	2	**TREYSHUN HURRY (SR.)**	82	Terrence McWilliams Jr. (Jr.)
WR	0	Tre Richardson* (Sr.)	86	Jackson Voth* (Jr.)
WR	7	Lawayne McCoy (Jr.)	14	Kris Hughes (Jr.)
LT	70	Anwar O'neal* (Sr.)	66	Johnnie Brown III* (Fr.)
LG	56	Eryx Daugherty *(Jr.)	55	Jimmy Williams III (So.)
C	58	Evan Wibberley* (Sr.)	72	Sam Secrest (Sr.)
RG	53	**LANCE ROBINSON (SR.)**	57	Naeer Jackson (Sr.)
RT	71	Cason Henry* (Sr.)	75	Cameron Gorin (Fr.)
TE	80	Brody Foley* (Sr.)	18	Jaleel Skinner (Sr.)
QB	3	Lincoln Kienholz* (Jr.)	11	Davin Wydner* (Jr.)
RB	1	**ISAAC BROWN (JR.)**	5	Keyjuan Brown (Jr.)

DEFENSE (5)

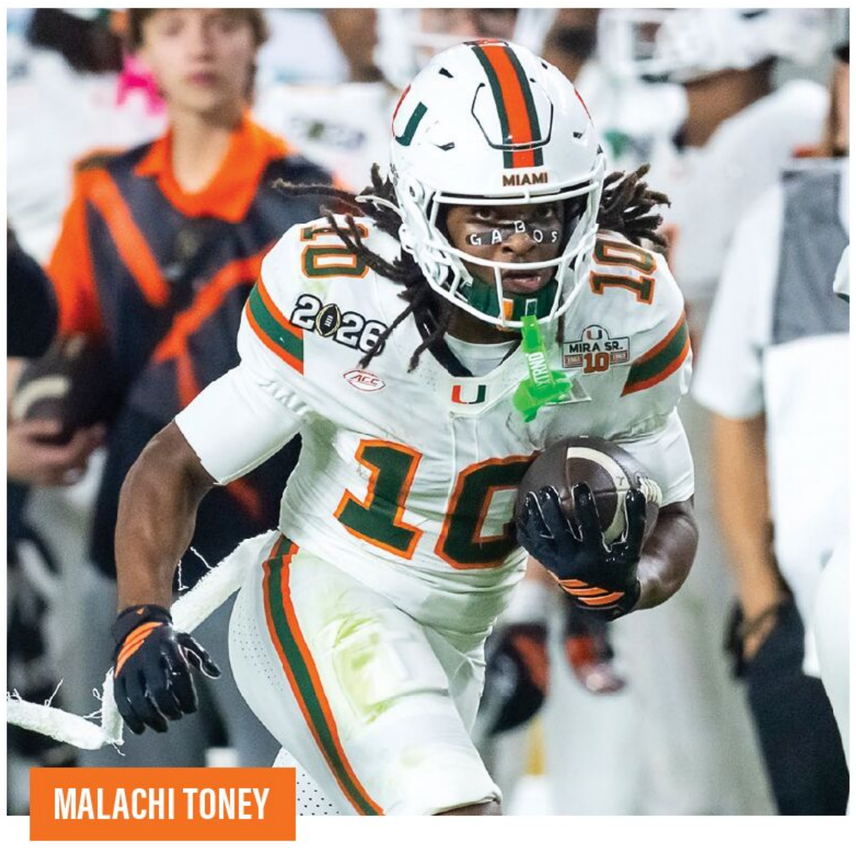
DE	17	AJ Green (Jr.)	3	Tyler Thompson* (Jr.)
DT	2	Demeco Kennedy*(Jr.)	90	Daylen Russell* (Fr.)
DT	95	Joshua Donald* (Jr.)	96	Tommy Ziesmer (Jr.)
DE	50	**CLEV LUBIN (SR.)**	99	Jerod Smith II* (Jr.)
LB	11	**T.J. CAPERS (JR.)**	23	Benjamin Perry* (Sr.)
LB	6	**STANQUAN CLARK (SR.)**	38	Cameron White (Fr.)
LB	9	**ANTONIO WATTS (SR.)**	43	Trent Carter (So.)
CB	13	**TAYON HOLLOWAY (SR.)**	25	Brycen Scott* (Jr.)
CB	12	DJ Waller Jr.* (Jr.)	28	Santana Wilson* (So.)
S	5	Koen Entringer* (Jr.)	26	Jordan Vann (Fr.)
S	10	Kaleb Beasley* (Jr.)	4	T.J. Banks* (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	35	Carson Hilbert (Fr.)	KR	0	Tre Richardson* (Sr.)
P	48	Jacob Baker* (Jr.)	PR	86	Jackson Voth* (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

JEFF ROMANCE-IMAGN IMAGES



MALACHI TONEY

SCOUTING THE HURRICANES

"They're absolutely the favorite in the ACC. [Head coach] Mario Cristobal has enough scars from losing heartbreaking games the last couple of years that he is not going to let that happen again. The people there that he's finally surrounded himself with are going to be in position to give him guidance, especially on game day, management of the game, all of those kinds of things with just making decisions to win the game. He's phenomenal around recruits. When it comes to getting big-time players to come there, he's special. It's great to see his growth as a head coach. I truly think that the painful losses that he's had the last couple years will be the reason why he makes sure that he wins the ACC this year."

— An opposing ACC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)

WR	18	Cooper Barkate* (Sr.)	8	Vandrevius Jacobs* (Jr.)
WR	17	Cam Vaughn* (Jr.)	3	Joshua Moore (So.)
WR	**10**	**MALACHI TONEY (SO.)**	13	Vance Spafford (Fr.)
LT	**78**	**MATTHEW MCCOY (SR.)**	72	Demetrius Campbell (Fr.)
LG	71	Jamal Meriweather* (Jr.)	66	Max Buchanan (So.)
C	76	Ryan Rodriguez (Sr.)	65	Seuseu Alofaituli (So.)
RG	63	Samson Okunlola (Jr.)	77	Juan Minaya (So.)
RT	79	Jackson Cantwell (Fr.)	71	Jaden Wilkerson (Fr.)
TE	9	Elija Lofton (Jr.)	88	Luka Gilbert (So.)
QB	10	Darian Mensah* (Jr.)	16	Luke Nickel (Fr.)
RB	**4**	**MARK FLETCHER JR. (SR.)**	6	CharMar Brown (Jr.)

DEFENSE (6)

DE	10	Damon Wilson II* (Sr.)	18	Armondo Blount (Jr.)
DT	**99**	**AHMAD MOTEN SR. (SR.)**	91	Jarquez Carter* (So.)
DT	**5**	**JUSTIN SCOTT (JR.)**	97	Keona Davis* (Jr.)
DE	12	Marquise Lightfoot (Jr.)	14	Hayden Lowe (Fr.)
OLB	32	Kamal Bonner (Jr.)	22	Cam Pruitt (Jr.)
ILB	**1**	**MOHAMED TOURE (SR.)**	41	Chase Smith (Sr.)
CB	**29**	**ROMANAS FREDERIQUE JR. (JR.)**	2	Damari Brown (Jr.)
CB	**6**	**XAVIER LUCAS (JR.)**	24	Ethan O'Connor (Jr.)
NB	0	Omar Thornton* (Jr.)	13	Bryce Fitzgerald (So.)
S	**7**	**ZECHARIAH POYSER (JR.)**	23	Dylan Day (Jr.)
S	13	Bryce Fitzgerald (So.)	38	Conrad Hussey* (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	82	Jack Olsen* (Sr.)	KR	2 Jordan Lyle (Jr.)
P	94	Dylan Joyce (Sr.)	PR	10 Malachi Toney (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

MARK J. REBILAS-IMAGN IMAGES

MIAMI HURRICANES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 7 | ACC PREDICTION: 1 | 2025 RECORD: 13-3, 6-2 ACC

OFFENSE Miami has explosive pieces on offense, led by former Duke standout quarterback Darian Mensah, who threw for 34 touchdowns and only six interceptions in leading the Blue Devils to the ACC title in 2025. The Hurricanes also picked up his favorite target at Duke — Cooper Barkate (1,106 yards, seven TDs last season). Now add in the return of one of the nation's most explosive slot threats in Malachi Toney (1,211 yards, 10 TDs), as well as running back Mark Fletcher Jr. (1,192 yards, 12 TDs), and the Canes have no shortage of weapons.

The big question is an offensive line that loses four starters and is relying on oft-injured center Ryan Rodriguez, true freshman tackle Jackson Cantwell and former 5-star recruit Samson Okunlola. The lone returner up front is Matthew McCoy, who could play guard or tackle.

DEFENSE Despite some key losses — including star ends Rueben Bain Jr. and Akheem Mesidor — this should once again be a playmaking group. Miami added fearsome Missouri pass rusher Damon Wilson II (nine sacks in 2025), and the team returns Marquise Lightfoot (2.5 sacks), DE/DT Armondo Blount (2.5 sacks), starting tackles Ahmad Moten Sr. (4.5 sacks) and Justin Scott (6.5 tackles for a loss).

The top four cornerbacks return, led by Romanas "OJ" Frederique Jr. (seven pass breakups) and Xavier Lucas (45 tackles, INT). Starting safety Zechariah Poyser (68 tackles) is joined by nickel/S Bryce Fitzgerald (six INTs) and Boston College transfer Omar Thornton (82 tackles).

An area of concern depth-wise is at linebacker. Mohamed Toure (84 tackles) is back, but the position has question marks, as guys like Chase Smith and former NC State transfer Kamal Bonner need to step up.

SPECIALISTS Northwestern transfer Jack Olsen (19-of-21 on field goals, with a long of 41 yards) will handle field goals with Florida State transfer Jake Weinberg handling kickoffs. Punter Dylan Joyce is one of the ACC's best, averaging 44.4 yards per punt last season. The return game should be explosive behind the speedy Toney (13.0 yards per punt return).

FINAL ANALYSIS Fresh off a run to the national title game, this year's Hurricanes might even be better. The offense has a pair of 1,000-yard receivers (Barkate, Toney), a 1,000-yard rusher (Fletcher) and one of the ACC's top returning QBs (Mensah). The defense added a massive pass-rush threat in Wilson and returns six starters. Head coach Mario Cristobal's roster-building has positioned Miami as an ACC favorite and legitimate national title threat.

2025 RESULTS (13-3, 6-2 ACC)

Aug. 31	Notre Dame	W	27-24
Sept. 6	Bethune-Cookman	W	45-3
Sept. 13	South Florida	W	49-12
Sept. 20	Florida	W	26-7
Oct. 4	at Florida State	W	28-22
Oct. 17	Louisville	L	21-24
Oct. 25	Stanford	W	42-7
Nov. 1	at SMU (ot)	L	20-26
Nov. 8	Syracuse	W	38-10
Nov. 15	NC State	W	41-7
Nov. 22	at Virginia Tech	W	34-17
Nov. 29	at Pitt	W	38-7
Dec. 20	at Texas A&M #	W	10-3
Dec. 31	vs. Ohio State %	W	24-14
Jan. 8	vs. Ole Miss &	W	31-27
Jan. 19	vs. Indiana $	L	21-27

#CFB Playoff First Round %Cotton Bowl: CFB Playoff Quarterfinal &Fiesta Bowl: CFB Playoff Semifinal $Miami: CFB Playoff National Championship

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 4	at Stanford
Sept. 10	Florida A&M
Sept. 18	at Wake Forest
Sept. 26	Central Michigan
Oct. 3	at Clemson
Oct. 17	Florida State
Oct. 24	Pitt
Oct. 31	at North Carolina
Nov. 7	at Notre Dame
Nov. 14	Duke
Nov. 20	Virginia Tech
Nov. 28	Boston College

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Jackson Cantwell, OT	★★★★★
2.	Somourian Wingo, WR	★★★★
3.	Gavin Mueller, TE	★★★★
4.	Asharri Charles, EDGE	★★★★
5.	Keshawn Stancil, DL	★★★★
6.	Milan Parris, WR	★★★★
7.	Ben Congdon, OT	★★★★
8.	Jaelen Waters, CB	★★★★
9.	Brody Jennings, CB	★★★★
10.	JJ Dunnigan, S	★★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Mario Cristobal • Record at School: 35-19 (4 years)
Career Record: 97-79 (14+ years) • Offensive Coordinator: Shannon Dawson
Defensive Coordinator: Corey Hetherman • Location: Coral Gables, Fla.
Stadium: Hard Rock Stadium (64,767)

NORTH CAROLINA TAR HEELS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 56 | ACC PREDICTION: 14 | 2025 RECORD: 4-8, 2-6 ACC

OFFENSE The success of North Carolina's offense will likely hinge on the quarterback decision and how quickly a rebuilt offensive line stabilizes. If Wisconsin transfer Billy Edwards Jr. wins the QB job, expect a controlled version of new offensive coordinator Bobby Petrino's scheme — quick-game concepts and selective deep shots. Edwards brings experience (520 career attempts at the Power 4 level) but lacks elite arm strength and experience in systems that align with Petrino's preferences. If Texas A&M transfer Miles O'Neill is pushed into the role, the ceiling rises, but so does the risk behind an unproven offensive line replacing all five starters.

Center Christo Kelly is the key piece for UNC's O-line after returning from injury, bringing more than 20 career starts from his time at FCS Holy Cross and leadership to a unit otherwise short on Power 4 experience. The tackles — long, physically imposing options like Jordan Hall — fit the prototype but remain unproven in pass protection, a critical variable in a Petrino system that prefers leaving tackles on an island. Skill talent is intriguing but largely undefined; this offense may lean on efficiency over explosiveness early while searching for identity.

DEFENSE There is more clarity on this side of the ball. Coordinator Steve Belichick inherits a defensive front anchored by Melkart Abou Jaoude, who posted 47 tackles and finished second in the ACC with 10.5 sacks last season. His return provides both production and leadership for a unit that brings back multiple contributors along the line.

The broader question is consistency. UNC struggled with fundamentals in 2025 — tackling, alignment, communication — and Belichick's system prioritizes those details. The linebacker room is being rebuilt, and the secondary features a mix of veterans and transfers who must quickly jell in a matchup-driven scheme. If the front generates pressure, the defense can take a step forward; if not, the lack of depth at linebacker could be exposed.

SPECIALISTS The kicking game is relatively stable, led by transfer placekicker Aeron Burrell and punter Jacob Horvath. Return production is less certain, with multiple options competing to replace departed contributors. Overall, this unit projects as steady but unspectacular.

FINAL ANALYSIS The offense has upside within Petrino's system, but early-season matchups against top defenses could mask progress while the offensive line and quarterback position settle. Defensively, improvement is more about execution, with Abou Jaoude providing a reliable anchor.

If the offensive line develops quickly and the quarterback situation stabilizes, UNC has the coaching to outperform last year's 4-8 mark. If not, inconsistency — particularly early — could again define the season.

2025 RESULTS (4-8, 2-6 ACC)

Sept. 1	TCU	L	14-48
Sept. 6	at Charlotte	W	20-3
Sept. 13	Richmond	W	41-6
Sept. 20	at UCF	L	9-34
Oct. 4	Clemson	L	10-38
Oct. 17	at Cal	L	18-21
Oct. 25	Virginia (ot)	L	16-17
Oct. 31	at Syracuse	W	27-10
Nov. 8	Stanford	W	20-15
Nov. 15	at Wake Forest	L	12-28
Nov. 22	Duke	L	25-32
Nov. 29	at NC State	L	19-42

2026 SCHEDULE

Aug. 29	vs. TCU #
Sept. 12	East Tennessee St.
Sept. 19	at Clemson
Oct. 3	Notre Dame
Oct. 10	at Pitt
Oct. 17	at Duke
Oct. 24	Syracuse
Oct. 31	Miami (Fla.)
Nov. 7	at UConn
Nov. 14	Louisville
Nov. 21	at Virginia
Nov. 28	NC State

#Dublin, Ireland

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Kenton Dopson III, CB	★★★★
2.	Jakob Weatherspoon, S	★★★★
3.	Calvin Thomas, LB	★★★★
4.	J.B. Shabazz, OT	★★★★
5.	C.J. Sadler, ATH	★★★★
6.	Keeyun Chapman, WR	★★★★
7.	Travis Burgess, QB	★★★
8.	Carnell Warren, WR	★★★
9.	Jimmy-Phrisco Alo-Suliafu, DL	★★★
10.	Vodney Cleveland, DL	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Bill Belichick • Record at School: 4-8 (1 year) • Career Record: 4-8 (1 year) • Offensive Coordinator: Bobby Petrino
Defensive Coordinator: Steve Belichick • Location: Chapel Hill, N.C. • Stadium: Kenan Stadium (50,500)

JORDAN SHIPP

SCOUTING THE TAR HEELS

"Schematically, it felt like a Bill Belichick defense. They do a really good job of using the people they have, mixing up who the rushers are, looking at who you are and how they want to match up to you. Week to week, they actually make better adjustments than a lot of people. They just didn't have the players. And they were better on defense than on offense. They were pretty bad on offense, but the guy they hired, Bobby Petrino, is phenomenal. He's as good of a coach as there is with offense in college football. I can't imagine how that dynamic [with Belichick] is gonna go, though. ... I don't think there's a sense that they've improved their evaluation abilities for this day and age of college football to bring in the right guys."

— An opposing ACC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (2)

WR	1	**JORDAN SHIPP (JR.)**	86	Madrid Tucker (Fr.)
WR	82	Nathan Leacock (Jr.)	4	Mason Humphrey* (Sr.)
WR	2	Trech Kekahuna* (Jr.)	11	Shanard Clower (So.)
LT	66	Jordan Hall (Jr.)	72	Eidan Buchanan (So.)
LG	68	Aidan Banfield (Jr.)	77	Trey Blue (Fr.)
C	56	Christo Kelly (Sr.)	69	Chad Lindberg (Sr.)
RG	54	Jonah Rodriguez* (Jr.)	70	Byron Nelson (Fr.)
RT	71	Jacqawn McRoy* (So.)	75	Andrew Threatt* (Sr.)
TE	45	Jelani Thurman* (Jr.)	80	Jordan Washington* (So.)
QB	9	Billy Edwards Jr.* (Sr.)	8	Miles O'Neill* (So.)
RB	0	**DEMON JUNE (SO.)**	7	Benjamin Hall (Jr.)

DEFENSE (3)

DE	40	Donovan Hoilette Jr.* (Sr.)	25	Joseph Mupoyi (So.)
DT	0	Isaiah Johnson (Sr.)	90	Xavier Lewis (So.)
DT	91	**LEROY JACKSON (SO.)**	14	Tarvorise Brown* (Jr.)
DE	9	**MELKART ABOU JAOUDE (SR.)**	11	Jaylen Harvey* (So.)
LB	10	Peyton Seelmann* (Jr.)	8	Jonathan Agumadu (So.)
LB	15	Derek McDonald* (Sr.)	54	Timir Hickman-Collins (So.)
CB	18	Jaiden Patterson (Jr.)	4	Jalon Thompson (Jr.)
CB	3	Ade Willie* (Sr.)	5	Ty Adams (Jr.)
NB	2	**KALEB COST (SR.)**	6	Tre Miller (Jr.)
S	16	Coleman Bryson (Sr.)	7	Peyton Waters (So.)
S	1	Greg Smith (So.)	24	Javion Butts (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	92	Aeron Burrell* (Jr.)	KR	27 Jaylen McGill (So.)
P	93	Jacob Horvath (Jr.)	PR	11 Shanard Clower (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

BOB DONNAN-IMAGN IMAGES

CJ BAILEY

CHARLES LECLAIRE-IMAGN IMAGES

NC STATE WOLFPACK

NATIONAL FORECAST: 46 | ACC PREDICTION: 9 | 2025 RECORD: 8-5, 4-4 ACC

OFFENSE Quarterback CJ Bailey heads into his third year as the starting quarterback and his second with offensive coordinator Kurt Roper. Roper's unit scored 30.2 points per game in his first season at the controls, and he is looking to continue that upward trajectory. Bailey, meanwhile, is coming off an impressive sophomore season. He threw for 3,105 yards with 25 touchdowns and just nine interceptions on a 68.8% completion rate. The signal-caller is confident that he will continue to progress, but he'll have to do so with a mostly new cast of characters around him.

The Wolfpack lost their top rusher (Hollywood Smothers) to the transfer portal, and their five leading pass-catchers all departed as well. Bailey will lean on junior Keenan Jackson, who caught 28 passes for 281 yards and two scores last season, while the Pack's transfer portal class will have to do a lot of heavy lifting. Keep an eye out for Appalachian State transfer Davion Dozier and Miami (Fla.) transfers Chance Robinson and Joshisa "Jojo" Trader. Redshirt sophomore running back Jayden "Duke" Scott is ready to take the starting reins in the backfield.

DEFENSE NC State's defense is entering its second season with coordinator DJ Eliot, whose pressure-based found its footing as 2025 went along.

Sophomore nose tackle Josiah Victor is primed to anchor the line, while transfers Popo Aguirre from Miami (Fla.) and Da'Karri Nelson from Penn State will patrol the second level. Tulane transfer edge Harvey Dyson, who led the AAC with eight sacks in '25, headlines the pass rush.

On the back end, the Wolfpack have options. Cornerback Brian Nelson II is set to start in his second season with the program, while Georgia transfer Ondre Evans has likely earned the starting spot opposite him. The safety room has game reps up and down the depth chart. As of now, it appears that Penn State transfer King Mack will start, with Asaad Brown Jr., Tristan Teasdell and Ronnie Royal III fighting for the other spot.

SPECIALISTS NC State returns kicker Kanoah Vinesett, who was 5-for-6 on field-goal attempts (with a long of 51) and 48-for-49 on extra-point attempts a year ago. The Pack turned to the transfer portal for punter Jackson Waller (Arkansas State), who averaged 41.3 yards per attempt a year ago and placed 19 of his 59 punts inside the 20-yard line.

FINAL ANALYSIS NC State hopes to take a step forward in a critical season for the program. Bailey looks ready to make the third-year jump under center, and the program's two second-year coordinators are ready to build off the momentum they enjoyed at the end of 2025. Look for a defense that flies around the field, with a high-tempo offense to complement it.

SCOUTING THE WOLFPACK

"They've always been able to recruit some of those edgier kids. When they get off the bus, they look like Clemson or they look like Florida State. It seems like every year with them, the hype has been really big, then it falls off quickly at some point. I don't know why that's the case. ... I don't think they really have the funds to compete at a high level in the ACC. For a while, they could feed off the great players they had there with the Russell Wilsons, the Mario Williams-type guys. But I don't get the sense that they have super deep pockets and that they're able to be competitive with NIL."

— An opposing ACC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)					
WR	16	Davion Dozier* (Jr.)	82	Chance Robinson* (So.)
WR	2	Joshisa Trader* (Jr.)	85	Tyreek Copper (Fr.)
WR	8	Keenan Jackson (Jr.)	13	Tyran Warren* (Sr.)
LT	62	Jimarion McCrimon* (Jr.)	56	Brody Smith (Fr.)
LG	72	Spike Sowells Jr. (So.)	79	Kamen Smith (Jr.)
C	50	Daniel Cruz* (So.)	72	Spike Sowells Jr. (So.)
RG	**64**	**RICO JACKSON (JR.)**	71	Yousef Mugharbil (Sr.)
RT	**54**	**TEAGUE ANDERSEN (SR.)**	74	Jai'Lun Hampton* (Sr.)
TE	19	Preston Douglas (So.)	88	Vander Ploog* (Fr.)
QB	**16**	**CJ BAILEY (JR.)**	10	Will Wilson (So.)
RB	4	Jayden Scott (So.)	7	Davion Gause* (Jr.)
DEFENSE (2)				
DE	92	Chase Bond (So.)	47	Adrian Farrow (So.)
NT	90	Josiah Victor (So.)	55	KaTron Evans* (Sr.)
DT	88	Isaiah Shirley (Jr.)	43	AJ Prim (Jr.)
JACK	5	Harvey Dyson* (Sr.)	25	Sterling Dixon (So.)
MLB	0	Popo Aguirre* (Sr.)	15	AJ Richardson (Jr.)
WLB	19	Da'Karri Nelson* (Jr.)	35	LaCorian Hodge (So.)
CB	20	Ondre Evans* (So.)	12	Caden Gordon (So.)
CB	7	Brian Nelson II (Jr.)	10	Ty White* (So.)
NB	**22**	**JACKSON VICK (SR.)**	8	Isaiah Crowell (Sr.)
SS	**6**	**ASAAD BROWN JR. (SO.)**	3	Tristan Teasdell (So.)
FS	16	King Mack* (Sr.)	2	Ronnie Royal III (So.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	94	Kanoah Vinesett (Sr.)	KR	4	Jayden Scott (So.)
P	96	Jackson Waller* (So.)	PR	0	Victor Snow (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

2025 RESULTS (8-5, 4-4 ACC)

Aug. 28	East Carolina	W	24-17
Sept. 6	Virginia	W	35-31
Sept. 11	at Wake Forest	W	34-24
Sept. 20	at Duke	L	33-45
Sept. 27	Virginia Tech	L	21-23
Oct. 4	Campbell	W	56-10
Oct. 11	at Notre Dame	L	7-36
Oct. 25	at Pitt	L	34-53
Nov. 1	Georgia Tech	W	48-36
Nov. 15	at Miami (Fla.)	L	7-41
Nov. 21	Florida State	W	21-11
Nov. 29	North Carolina	W	42-19
Dec. 19	vs. Memphis #	W	31-7

#Gasparilla Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Aug. 29	vs. Virginia #
Sept. 12	Richmond
Sept. 19	at Vanderbilt
Sept. 26	Appalachian State
Oct. 3	Louisville
Oct. 10	Wake Forest
Oct. 24	at Stanford
Oct. 31	Cal
Nov. 7	Duke
Nov. 14	Syracuse
Nov. 21	at Florida State
Nov. 28	at North Carolina

#Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Amiri Acker, WR	★★★★
2.	Tyreek Copper, WR	★★★★
3.	Stephen Brown, TE	★★★★
4.	Damaad Lewis, EDGE	★★★
5.	Tex Vaughn, TE	★★★
6.	Aiden Smalls, ATH	★★★
7.	Jai Richburg, WR	★★★
8.	Josh Warren Jr., EDGE	★★★
9.	Jordyn Best, CB	★★★
10.	Tristen Hill, S	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Dave Doeren • Record at School: 95-70 (13 years)
Career Record: 118-74 (15 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Kurt Roper
Defensive Coordinator: DJ Eliot • Location: Raleigh, N.C.
Stadium: Carter-Finley Stadium (56,919)

PITT PANTHERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 40 | ACC PREDICTION: 7 | 2025 RECORD: 8-5, 6-2 ACC

OFFENSE The quarterback position has been more Pitt stop than permanent in recent seasons. Now, along comes Mason Heintschel, a midseason revelation who fueled an 8-5 finish in 2025 with an "I'm Him" mentality. The lightly recruited freshman was summoned by head coach Pat Narduzzi after a 2-2 start and promptly went 5-0, putting the Panthers in the College Football Playoff conversation before late-season losses to Notre Dame and Miami (Fla.). He went 6-3 overall, a run that featured four consecutive road victories, four 300-yard passing games and two upsets of ranked opponents. The 6-foot-2 Ohio native threw for 2,354 yards with 16 touchdowns and a 63.6% completion rate.

Coordinator Kade Bell oversaw a unit that ranked 20th nationally in scoring (33.7 ppg) and passing (273.3 ypg), though the running game ranked 115th (117.2 ypg). Tailback Ja'Kyrian Turner emerged in the final five games with 127 rushing yards at Stanford, 201 at Georgia Tech and 93 vs. East Carolina in the Military Bowl. The true freshman had a team-high 745 rushing yards (5.3 per carry) with seven scores. Returners Keith Gouveia, Ryan Baer and BJ Williams lead the O-line.

Other than returning starter Cataurus Hicks (24 receptions, 422 yards, long of 84), the receiving corps is light on experience. FCS Western Carolina transfer Malik Knight, freshman Dylan Wester and sophomores Tony Kinsler and Bryce Yates must be quick studies.

DEFENSE Braylan Lovelace aims to become Pitt's next iconic linebacker. He posted a career-best 80 tackles and returned an interception 100 yards for a touchdown in a win over Georgia Tech. The senior middle linebacker could pair nicely with rising star Cameron Lindsey, a former backup who posted 32 tackles, five for a loss, two sacks, a pass breakup and a forced fumble. Purdue transfer Alex Sanford Jr. will play extensively.

The line features returners Isaiah Neal, Nick James, Sean FitzSimmons and Jimmy Scott — a quartet that enabled Pitt to rank No. 8 nationally vs. the run. Hard-hitting safety Cruce Brookins (53 tackles, two interceptions) and corner Shawn Lee Jr. (four pass breakups) lead the secondary.

SPECIALISTS FCS transfers Sam Hunsaker (15-of-22 on field-goal attempts in two seasons at Northern Arizona) and Antonio Chadha (28-of-38 in two seasons at Western Illinois) will vie for placekicking duties. FCS Idaho State transfer Gabe Russo averaged 46.3 yards on 38 punts in '25.

FINAL ANALYSIS Much is expected of the 19-year-old Heintschel after he led Pitt to a second-place ACC finish and its most victories since '22. If the Panthers can take advantage of a four-game homestand to start the season, the momentum could once again lead to eight (or more) victories.

MASON HEINTSCHEL

SCOUTING THE PANTHERS

"They're a really good defensive team, and they're adequate on offense, I guess. If you've got a Kenny Pickett, then you're gonna be really good. I thought they did an awesome job with [quarterback Eli Holstein] the past two years. When they're good, they're really good, but they're not that dynamic. I don't know who you're concerned about when they're on offense. On defense, they've got good players, but they're really great at what they do. It's more like they're coached really well and their players fit the system. They do create turnovers and things like that. ... They put [quarterback Mason Heintschel] in there, and they could just check it down to the running back all day. I do think they're well-coached. I just don't think that they're elite anywhere on offense."

— An opposing ACC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)					
WR	18	Malik Knight* (Sr.)	17	Tony Kinsler (So.)
WR	**3**	**CATAURUS HICKS (JR.)**	10	Censere Lee (Sr.)
WR	80	Bryce Yates (So.)	84	Cam Sapp (Fr.)
LT	53	Kendall Stanley (Sr.)	74	Netinho Olivieri* (Sr.)
LG	66	Keith Gouveia (Sr.)	56	Keylen Davis* (Sr.)
C	**71**	**RYAN CARRETTA (JR.)**	72	Isaiah Montgomery (Sr.)
RG	**55**	**BJ WILLIAMS (SR.)**	68	Torian Chester (Fr.)
RT	**70**	**RYAN BAER (SR.)**	51	Jiavani Cooley (So.)
TE	85	Carson Kent (Sr.)	82	Elijah Lagg* (Sr.)
QB	**6**	**MASON HEINTSCHEL (SO.)**	11	Holden Geriner* (Sr.)
RB	25	Ja'Kyrian Turner (So.)	29	La'Vell Wright* (Sr.)
DEFENSE (5)				
DE	**2**	**ISAIAH NEAL (JR.)**	56	Jaeden Moore (Jr.)
DL	**55**	**SEAN FITZSIMMONS (SR.)**	95	Eliyt Nairne* (Jr.)
DL	11	Nick James (Sr.)	45	Jeremiah Warren* (Jr.)
DE	**44**	**JIMMY SCOTT (SR.)**	5	Zach Crothers (So.)
LB	10	Alex Sanford Jr.* (Sr.)	31	DeMarco Ward* (Jr.)
LB	**0**	**BRAYLAN LOVELACE (SR.)**	52	Abe Ibrahim (Sr.)
LB	24	Cameron Lindsey (So.)	38	Emmanuel Taylor (So.)
CB	21	Shadarian Harrison (Jr.)	23	Kanye Thompson* (Sr.)
CB	28	Shawn Lee Jr. (So.)	16	Raion Strader* (Sr.)
SS	14	Josh Guerrier (So.)	26	Allen Bryant (So.)
FS	**12**	**CRUCE BROOKINS (JR.)**	17	Cole Woodson (Fr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	91	Sam Hunsaker* (Jr.)	KR	3	Cataurus Hicks (Jr.)
P	98	Gabe Russo* (Jr.)	PR	3	Cataurus Hicks (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

2025 RESULTS (8-5, 6-2 ACC)

Aug. 30	Duquesne	W	61-9
Sept. 6	Central Michigan	W	45-17
Sept. 13	at West Virginia (ot)	L	24-31
Sept. 27	Louisville	L	27-34
Oct. 4	Boston College	W	48-7
Oct. 11	at Florida State	W	34-31
Oct. 18	at Syracuse	W	30-13
Oct. 25	NC State	W	53-34
Nov. 1	at Stanford	W	35-20
Nov. 15	Notre Dame	L	15-37
Nov. 22	at Georgia Tech	W	42-28
Nov. 29	Miami (Fla.)	L	7-38
Dec. 27	vs. East Carolina #	L	17-23

#Military Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	Miami (Ohio)
Sept. 12	UCF
Sept. 17	Syracuse
Sept. 26	Bucknell
Oct. 2	at Virginia Tech
Oct. 10	North Carolina
Oct. 17	at Boston College
Oct. 24	at Miami (Fla.)
Oct. 31	Georgia Tech
Nov. 13	Florida State
Nov. 21	at Louisville
Nov. 28	at Cal

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Corey Dailey, QB	★★★
2.	Rodney Dunbar, WR	★★★
3.	Damon Ferguson Jr., RB	★★★
4.	Nick Howard, OT	★★★
5.	Isaiah Simmons, LB	★★★
6.	Marcus Jennings, LB	★★★
7.	Reston Lehman, LB	★★★
8.	Kentrail McRae, CB	★★★
9.	Dylan Wester, WR	★★★
10.	Da'Ron Barksdale, CB	★★★

*Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Pat Narduzzi • Record at School: 80-61 (11 years)
Career Record: 80-61 (11 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Kade Bell
Defensive Coordinator: Cory Sanders • Location: Pittsburgh, Pa.
Stadium: Acrisure Stadium (68,400)

CHARLES LECLAIRE-IMAGN IMAGES

KEVIN JENNINGS

SCOUTING THE MUSTANGS

"Man, [head coach Rhett Lashlee] does a great job. He's done such a great job the last several years, and the football world knows it, too. Any time one of these big jobs opens up, you're probably gonna hear Rhett's name. They do a great job with recruiting and the true evaluation of players. Just being able to get those guys in at that university — it's one of those high-academic schools that you have to be able to get in and stay in. ... I know a lot of the guys on SMU's staff, and I think [Lashlee's] coaches are some of the best that I've been around. He just knows how to evaluate people."

— An opposing ACC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)

WR	10	Jalen Cooper (So.)	3	Yannick Smith* (Jr.)
WR	2	Jalen Hale* (Jr.)	45	Isaiah Robertson (Fr.)
WR	8	Yamir Knight (Sr.)	0	Derrick McFall (So.)
LT	**59**	**PJ WILLIAMS (SR.)**	78	Drew Evers (Fr.)
LG	77	Alex Woods (Jr.)	58	Abel Hoopii (So.)
C	**64**	**JOSHUA BATES (JR.)**	50	Graham Uter (So.)
RG	**63**	**ADDISON NICHOLS (SR.)**	52	Toa Katoa (Fr.)
RT	74	Andrew Chamblee (Sr.)	75	Dramodd Odoms (Fr.)
TE	18	Theo Melin Ohrstrom* (Sr.)	5	Randy Pittman Jr.* (Sr.)
QB	**7**	**KEVIN JENNINGS (SR.)**	1	Ty Hawkins (Fr.)
RB	6	Kendrick Raphael* (Sr.)	4	Dramekco Green (Fr.)

DEFENSE (4)

DE	58	Aakil Washington (Sr.)	9	Ira Singleton IV* (Jr.)
DT	97	Christian Davis* (Jr.)	94	Jonathan Jefferson (Sr.)
DT	5	Malcolm Alcorn-Crowder* (Sr.)	55	Woo Spencer (Jr.)
DE	6	Tavion Atkinson* (Jr.)	52	Jahkai Lang (Jr.)
LB	**54**	**ALEXANDER KILGORE (SR.)**	29	Brandon Miyazono (Sr.)
LB	**28**	**BRANDON BOOKER (JR.)**	12	Caden Marshall* (So.)
CB	4	Jayvon Thomas* (Sr.)	**0**	**WILLIAM NETTLES (SO.)**
CB	**8**	**MARCELLUS BARNES JR. (SO.)**	13	Jaelyn Davis-Robinson (Sr.)
NB	1	Jarvis Lee* (Sr.)	15	La'Modrick Spencer (Sr.)
S	21	Jimmy Wyrick* (Sr.)	26	Jaylen Moses (So.)
S	10	Tyren Polley Jr. (So.)	22	Sael Reyes (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	99	Nick Reed* (Jr.)	KR 24	Link Rhodes (Sr.)
P	43	Wade McSparron (So.)	PR 8	Yamir Knight (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

KIRBY LEE-IMAGN IMAGES

SMU MUSTANGS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 22 | ACC PREDICTION: 2 | 2025 RECORD: 9-4, 6-2 ACC

OFFENSE Kevin Jennings returns at quarterback, but his group of tight ends, wide receivers and running backs is almost completely different. Jennings was injured in 2025, hampering his ability to run, but he took a step forward as a passer, ranking in the top 10 nationally for passing yards.

Alabama transfer Jalen Hale and East Carolina transfer Yannick Smith arrive to bolster the wide receiver room, while Jalen Cooper and Isaiah Robertson look to assert themselves in their second season at SMU. Yamir Knight is a dynamic slot receiver for Jennings. Cal transfer running back Kendrick Raphael is expected to pair with second-year back Dramekco Green to provide plenty of backfield production.

The offensive line is a strong unit, with three returning starters, including PJ Williams, who figures to be a high NFL Draft pick.

DEFENSE Last year, the SMU defense was all over the place, with moments of impressive play followed by huge game-changing lapses.

SMU brings back Marcellus Barnes Jr. and William "Speedy" Nettles at corner and Tyren Polley Jr. at safety, but the rest of the secondary has been revamped with transfers. UTSA safety Jimmy Wyrick, USF nickel Jarvis Lee and Texas A&M transfer cornerback Jayvon Thomas all are expected to make a major impact.

SMU returns an impressive trio of linebackers in Brandon Booker, Alexander Kilgore and Brandon Miyazono. Up front, SMU reworked the defensive line with Louisiana Tech transfer Christian Davis and Kansas State transfer Malcolm Alcorn-Crowder, and 2024 standout Jonathan Jefferson returns after missing all of the 2025 season due to injury.

Finding a pass rush from the likes of Aakil Washington, Ira Singleton IV, Tavion Atkinson, Marques White, Jahkai Lang and others will be critical.

SPECIALISTS Placekicking was an adventure for SMU last season, so the Mustangs brought in FCS New Hampshire All-American Nick Reed. Punter Wade McSparron and long-snapper Morgan Tribett return for the Mustangs. Knight is locked in as the punt returner, while kickoff returns are up for grabs a bit with Link Rhodes and Daylon Singleton both back.

FINAL ANALYSIS With Jennings back, SMU should be among the favorites to win the ACC championship. Head coach Rhett Lashlee's team has been among the nation's most consistent programs for the past few seasons, and expectations are as high now as they've ever been. Lashlee and his staff seemed to hit on transfers who could push the team over the top. If so, SMU could find itself back in Charlotte playing in the ACC Championship Game. It's College Football Playoff or bust for this team.

2025 RESULTS (9-4, 6-2 ACC)

Aug. 30	East Texas A&M	W	42-13
Sept. 6	Baylor (ot)	L	45-48
Sept. 13	at Missouri State	W	28-10
Sept. 20	at TCU	L	24-35
Oct. 4	Syracuse	W	31-18
Oct. 11	Stanford	W	34-10
Oct. 18	at Clemson	W	35-24
Oct. 25	at Wake Forest	L	12-13
Nov. 1	Miami (ot)	W	26-20
Nov. 8	at Boston College	W	45-13
Nov. 22	Louisville	W	38-6
Nov. 29	at Cal	L	35-38
Jan. 2	vs. Arizona #	W	24-19

#Holiday Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 7	at Florida State
Sept. 12	UC Davis
Sept. 19	at Louisville
Sept. 26	Missouri State
Oct. 3	Boston College
Oct. 17	Virginia
Oct. 24	Cal
Oct. 31	at Syracuse
Nov. 7	Virginia Tech
Nov. 14	Wake Forest
Nov. 21	at Notre Dame
Nov. 28	at Stanford

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Drew Evers, IOL	★★★★
2.	Christian Rhodes, RB	★★★★
3.	EJ Kelly, RB	★★★★
4.	Evan Goodwin, OT	★★★★
5.	David Chukwuemeka, DL	★★★★
6.	Amontre Harris, EDGE	★★★
7.	Hudson Woods, EDGE	★★★
8.	I'Zayah Young, LB	★★★
9.	Sam Utu, IOL	★★★
10.	Jakai Anderson, WR	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Rhett Lashlee • Record at School: 38-16 (4 years)
Career Record: 38-16 (4 years) • Offensive Coordinators: Garin Justice, D'Eriq King • Defensive Coordinators: Maurice Crum Jr., Rickey Hunley Jr.
Location: Dallas, Texas • Stadium: Gerald J. Ford Stadium (33,200)

STANFORD CARDINAL

NATIONAL FORECAST: 84 | ACC PREDICTION: 17 | 2025 RECORD: 4-8, 3-5 ACC

OFFENSE The Stanford offense will center around quarterback Davis Warren, running back Micah Ford, wide receiver Caden High and tight end Benji Blackburn. A veteran with starting experience at Michigan, Warren brings a good presence in the pocket, an ability to make plays with his legs and a knack for clutch throws. He threw for 1,199 yards, seven touchdowns and nine interceptions for the Wolverines in 2024.

Ford rushed for 643 yards and four touchdowns on 145 carries last season and could flirt with 1,000 rushing yards this season. High had 37 receptions for 414 yards and one touchdown last season, while Blackburn had nine receptions for 109 yards and one touchdown. Both guys should see plenty of targets and could make a real impact. It'll be interesting to see what new head coach Tavita Pritchard brings in terms of scheme.

Up front, Niki Prongos, Fisher Anderson and Simione Pale will anchor the offensive line. Their play will be critical in the Cardinal's quest for offensive balance.

DEFENSE Middle linebacker Matt Rose is the heart and soul of the Cardinal defense. He is coming off a season in which he had 106 total tackles (49 solo) and eight tackles for a loss. He should once again wreak havoc everywhere on the field.

The safety room is also strong with Jay Green, Scotty Edwards, Charlie Eckhardt and Darrius Davis. Cornerback Brandon Nicholson looks to take his game up a notch from last year.

On the defensive line, Braden Marceau-Olayinka and Zach Rowell should both be forces after making significant strides last season. The Cardinal played top-25-level defense in the red zone in 2025 and will look to keep that momentum going under new defensive coordinator Kris Richard.

SPECIALISTS Punter Aidan Flintoft and placekicker Emmet Kenney are both veteran guys with a lot of experience. The real question on special teams is whether or not the Cardinal can make some noise in the return game. High will look to do his part.

FINAL ANALYSIS Coming off a 4-8 season in which it defeated Cal to win the Stanford Axe, Stanford is hoping to build on what it did last year and take more steps forward in 2026. Given the Cardinal's schedule, they'll be hard pressed to win five-plus games, but the belief in the program's trajectory is there, spearheaded by Stanford alumni Andrew Luck (general manager) and Pritchard.

JAY GREEN

SCOUTING THE CARDINAL

"The direction that they went with [new head coach] Tavita Pritchard and obviously with [general manager] Andrew Luck being there, just having those guys in the building after they cried, sweat, bled in those same locker rooms and on that same field, that's gonna give those guys a bit of an edge. Knowing that they got someone there from home to be leading them, it's just like what Cal has with [new head coach] Tosh Lupoi being there. ... Their recruiting is still so much more on the academic side. Like it's truly, 'we're a better school because of academics.' That's the only thing I would ever hear about what they were doing."

— An opposing ACC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)

WR	0	Caden High (Sr.)	23	Nico Brown* (Jr.)
WR	19	David Pantelis (Sr.)	4	Jordan Onovughe (Jr.)
WR	11	JonAnthony Hall (Fr.)	15	Carter Shaw (So.)
LT	68	**NIKI PRONGOS (SR.)**	79	Kai Greer (So.)
LG	60	Nick Fattig (Jr.)	59	Charlie Hoitink (So.)
C	74	**FISHER ANDERSON (SR.)**	63	Carson Caplan (Fr.)
RG	55	**SIMIONE PALE (SR.)**	62	Josh Williams (So.)
RT	58	**KAHLIL HOUSE (SO.)**	51	Ziron Brown (So.)
TE	88	Benji Blackburn (Jr.)	84	Chico Holt (Jr.)
QB	8	Davis Warren* (Sr.)	9	Mike Mitchell Jr. (Fr.)
RB	20	**MICAH FORD (SO.)**	26	Sedrick Irvin Jr. (Sr.)

DEFENSE (5)

DE	45	Omar Staples (Jr.)	95	Adam Shovlin (Fr.)
DT	75	Braden Marceau-Olayinka (Jr.)	42	Jacobi Murray (So.)
DT	97	Zach Rowell (Sr.)	96	Connor Bachhuber (So.)
OLB	11	**TEVARUA TAFITI (SR.)**	2	Dylan Stephenson (So.)
ILB	35	**MATT ROSE (SR.)**	38	Zach Johnson (Jr.)
ILB	0	**JAHSIAH GALVAN (SR.)**	10	Sam Mattingly (Jr.)
OLB	44	Ernest "R.J." Cooper (Sr.)	88	Keysaun Eleazer (Fr.)
CB	9	Brandon Nicholson (So.)	8	Cam Richardson (Jr.)
CB	4	Leroy Bryant* (Jr.)	14	Dre Pollard (Fr.)
S	21	**SCOTTY EDWARDS (SR.)**	29	Darrius Davis (Jr.)
S	5	**JAY GREEN (SR.)**	39	Charlie Eckhardt (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	13	Emmet Kenney (Sr.)	KR	0 Caden High (Sr.)
P	37	Aidan Flintoft (Sr.)	PR	13 Liam Thorpe (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

2025 RESULTS (4-8, 3-5 ACC)

Aug. 23	at Hawai'i	L	20-23
Sept. 6	at BYU	L	3-27
Sept. 13	Boston College	W	30-20
Sept. 20	at Virginia	L	20-48
Sept. 27	San José State	W	30-29
Oct. 11	at SMU	L	10-34
Oct. 18	Florida State	W	20-13
Oct. 25	at Miami (Fla.)	L	7-42
Nov. 1	Pitt	L	20-35
Nov. 8	at North Carolina	L	15-20
Nov. 22	Cal	W	31-10
Nov. 29	Notre Dame	L	20-49

2026 SCHEDULE

Aug. 29	Hawai'i
Sept. 4	Miami (Fla.)
Sept. 19	at Duke
Sept. 26	Georgia Tech
Oct. 3	at Wake Forest
Oct. 10	at Notre Dame
Oct. 17	Elon
Oct. 24	NC State
Oct. 31	at Louisville
Nov. 14	at Virginia Tech
Nov. 21	at Cal
Nov. 28	SMU

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

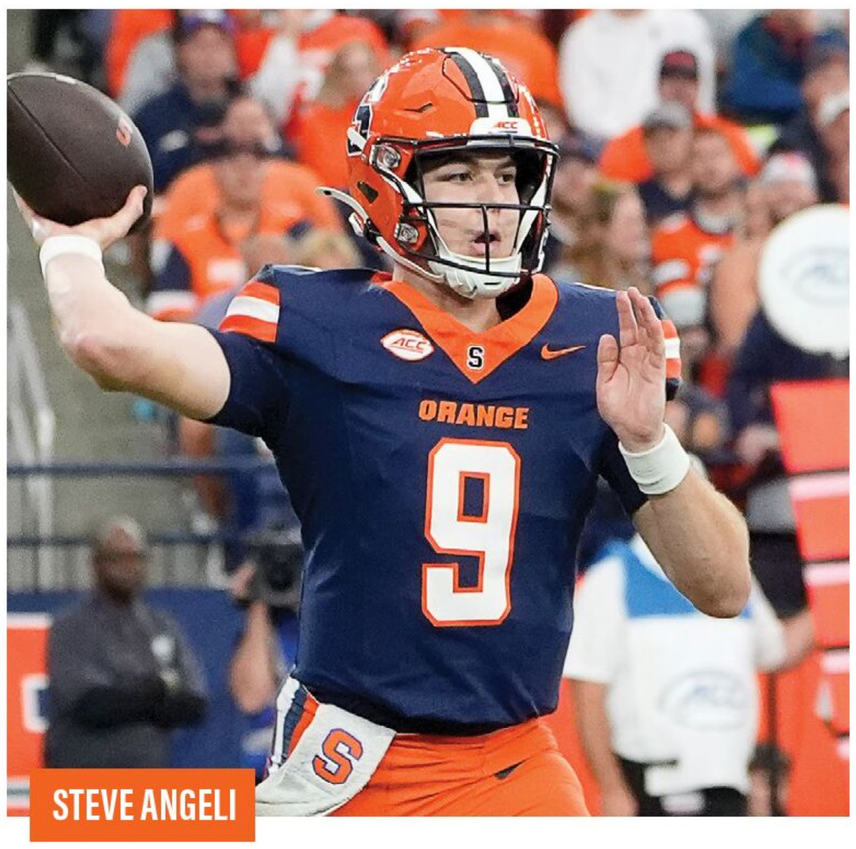
1.	Lasiah Jackson, CB	★★★★
2.	Dre Pollard, ATH	★★★★
3.	Jay Miller, IOL	★★★★
4.	Max Meier, EDGE	★★★★
5.	Zion Robinson, WR	★★★
6.	Langdon Horace, WR	★★★
7.	Xavier Harmon, CB	★★★
8.	Mike Mitchell Jr., QB	★★★
9.	Keysaun Eleazer, EDGE	★★★
10.	Blaise Thomassie, IOL	★★★

**Per Rivals*

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Tavita Pritchard • Record at School: First Season • Career Record: First Season • Offensive Coordinator: Terry Heffernan • Defensive Coordinator: Kris Richard • Location: Palo Alto, Calif. • Stadium: Stanford Stadium (50,424)

DARREN YAMASHITA-IMAGN IMAGES



STEVE ANGELI

SCOUTING THE ORANGE

"If [quarterback] Steve Angeli is healthy, it'll be fixed. It's really what it comes down to. I don't know if the other guys in that room are any good. But [Angeli] is really good. ... [Head coach] Fran Brown is a good leader. If he sticks to his strengths, he'll do fine. He does a good job running that program. He does a good job evaluating. Hopefully the overhaul of the staff will help him tremendously, especially on the defensive side. On the offensive side, I don't really know the receivers they brought in, but there's some talent still there. They let some good players go, and I know they changed ADs, but I think [Brown] is in good shape there. I don't think they're a place that wants to spend a lot of money to get rid of a coach unless they just bomb it."

— An opposing ACC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)					
WR	2	Umari Hatcher (Sr.)	17	Elijah Moore* (So.)
WR	11	Cole Weaver* (Jr.)	15	Amare' Gough (Fr.)
WR	8	Tyshawn Russell (Jr.)	14	Zamondre Merriweather (Jr.)
LT	**75**	**TREVION MACK (JR.)**	60	Naquil Betrand (Jr.)
LG	69	Oluwafunto Akinshilo* (Sr.)	55	Zach Rice (Sr.)
C	**78**	**JOE CRUZ (SR.)**	74	Matthew Hawn (Fr.)
RG	76	Byron Washington (So.)	71	Jayden Mann (Fr.)
RT	77	Kam Pringle (So.)		David Ndukwe* (Sr.)
TE	0	David Clement (Sr.)	81	Noah Meyers* (Jr.)
QB	**9**	**STEVE ANGELI (SR.)**	12	Amari Odom* (Jr.)
RB	4	Ju'Juan Johnson* (Jr.)	22	Ahmad Miller* (Jr.)
DEFENSE (5)				
DE	30	Tunmise Adeleye* (Sr.)	18	David Omopariola (Jr.)
DT	14	Keyshawn Johnson* (Sr.)	15	Nathan Nyandoro (So.)
DT	92	Rashard Perry (Sr.)	11	Nissi Ogbebor (So.)
DT	95	Dillan Fontus* (Sr.)	99	Isaiah Hastings (Sr.)
LB	6	Chris D'Appolonia* (Jr.)	2	Zyian Moultrie-Goddard (Jr.)
LB	**5**	**ANTOINE DESLAURIERS (SO.)**	**10**	**GARY BRYANT III (SR.)**
LB	82	Jamie Tremble (Jr.)	33	Gemaus Sackie (Fr.)
CB	**1**	**DEMETRES SAMUEL JR. (SO.)**	27	Javon Lawrence (Fr.)
CB	**12**	**CHRIS PEAL (JR.)**	4	Chase Geter (Fr.)
S	0	Braheem Long Jr. (Jr.)	**19**	**CORNELL PERRY (SR.)**
S	7	Nazir Ward* (Jr.)	13	Amare Snowden* (Jr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	47	Tripp Woody (So.)	KR	1	Demetres Samuel Jr. (So.)
P	41	Jimmy Gregg (Fr.)	PR	1	Demetres Samuel Jr. (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

GREGORY FISHER-IMAGN IMAGES

SYRACUSE ORANGE

NATIONAL FORECAST: 71 | ACC PREDICTION: 15 | 2025 RECORD: 3-9, 1-7 ACC

OFFENSE Syracuse was 3-1 when quarterback Steve Angeli was ruled out for the 2025 season due to a torn Achilles tendon. The Orange finished 3-9, failing to score more than 18 points in any of the eight losses that followed. If the Fran Brown era is to be rejuvenated in 2026, it will almost certainly be on the back of his star quarterback. Angeli, who started his career at Notre Dame (2023-24) and was leading the nation in passing yards (1,317) at the time of his injury, was a limited participant during spring practice but is expected to be ready for fall camp.

Around Angeli will be a committee of skill-position players, including a bevy of transfers. SU doesn't return anyone who recorded more than 130 rushing or receiving yards last year. And it doesn't help that 5-star freshman WR Calvin Russell III suffered a torn Achilles of his own in March. Former LSU running back Ju'Juan Johnson and Miami (Ohio) wide receiver Cole Weaver will be among the newcomers getting significant early opportunities.

Up front, the Orange feature an experienced offensive line bolstered by the addition of Houston transfer David Ndukwe.

DEFENSE A step forward on defense starts in the trenches for Syracuse, and a trio of transfers in Dillan Fontus (Maryland), Keyshawn Johnson (FCS UT-Martin) and Tunmise Adeleye (UNLV) is expected to provide an immediate boost. The Orange allowed 5.3 yards per carry last season — ranking 132nd of 136 teams in the FBS.

But under new defensive coordinator Vince Kehres, the reloaded defensive line room should have the personnel to fit into what's expected to be a variable scheme featuring 4-3 and 3-4 bases.

The question is whether the Orange can execute in run fits and avoid miscommunications on the back end in Year 1 of the system. Interior linebackers like Chris D'Appolonia and Antoine Deslauriers will be tasked with leading communication, while SU's corners project to take on heavy man-coverage assignments.

SPECIALISTS Tripp Woody returns as placekicker after making 12-of-14 field goals last season, including all 10 of his attempts inside 40 yards. But SU must replace standout punter Jack Stonehouse, likely hoping that highly touted prospect Jimmy Gregg can hit the ground running.

FINAL ANALYSIS Brown's dazzling 10-3 debut campaign is fading into the rearview faster by the day, and the reality is that winning in Syracuse over the past quarter-century has hinged on QB play. Keeping Angeli upright is priority No. 1, while preparing transfer quarterback additions Amari Odom (Kennesaw State) and Malachi Nelson (UTEP) is right behind.

2025 RESULTS (3-9, 1-7 ACC)

Aug. 30	vs. Tennessee #	L	26-45
Sept. 6	UConn (ot)	W	27-20
Sept. 12	Colgate	W	66-24
Sept. 20	at Clemson	W	34-21
Sept. 27	Duke	L	3-38
Oct. 4	at SMU	L	18-31
Oct. 18	Pitt	L	13-30
Oct. 25	at Georgia Tech	L	16-41
Oct. 31	North Carolina	L	10-27
Nov. 8	at Miami (Fla.)	L	10-38
Nov. 22	at Notre Dame	L	7-70
Nov. 29	Boston College	L	12-34

#Atlanta

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	New Hampshire
Sept. 12	Cal
Sept. 17	at Pitt
Oct. 3	at UConn
Oct. 10	at Virginia
Oct. 17	Louisville
Oct. 24	at North Carolina
Oct. 31	SMU
Nov. 7	Clemson
Nov. 14	at NC State
Nov. 21	at Boston College
Nov. 28	Notre Dame

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Calvin Russell III, WR	★★★★
2.	Tedarius Hughes, S	★★★
3.	Javeion Cooper, OT	★★★
4.	Jarius Rodgers, EDGE	★★★
5.	Chase Geter, CB	★★★
6.	Joseph White, OT	★★★
7.	Kamron Wilson, EDGE	★★★
8.	Amare' Gough, WR	★★★
9.	Alex Haskell, DL	★★★
10.	Darnell Stokes Jr., ATH	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Fran Brown • Record at School: 13-12 (2 years)
Career Record: 13-12 (2 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Jeff Nixon
Defensive Coordinators: Vince Kehres, John Scott Jr.
Location: Syracuse, N.Y. • Stadium: JMA Wireless Dome (42,784)

VIRGINIA CAVALIERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 39 | ACC PREDICTION: 6 | 2025 RECORD: 11-3, 7-1 ACC

OFFENSE Virginia's offseason mission prioritized the retention of its veteran offensive line, and that unit is the Cavaliers' backbone heading into the fall. Projected starters McKale Boley, Noah Josey, Drake Metcalf, Makilan Thomas and Monroe Mills have combined for 164 career starts, making UVa's O-line the most experienced in the nation. The Hoos want to run behind that group. Boley and Josey were All-ACC performers in 2025, helping UVa rush for 2,502 yards, the program's most since 2004.

UVa is deep at running back even though they're replacing J'Mari Taylor, a first-team All-ACC performer. Tennessee transfer Peyton Lewis has the most elite combination of size and speed for a running back that the Cavaliers have had in fifth-year head coach Tony Elliott's tenure. Middle Tennessee transfer Jekail Middlebrook will get plenty of touches, and Xavier Brown and UAB transfer Solomon Beebe are capable contributors.

Quarterback Beau Pribula, a Missouri transfer, will factor into the running game, too. But Pribula must progress as a passer. He was third in the SEC in completion rate (67.4%) last fall, but his touchdown-to-interception ratio was 11-to-9. He must reduce his turnovers.

Some new receivers must emerge after the Cavaliers lost six of their top seven receptions leaders from last fall.

DEFENSE UVa is strongest up the middle, where the headliner is linebacker Kam Robinson. Last season, he became the first FBS player in 20 years to block a punt, return an interception for a touchdown and recover a fumble in the same season, although he missed six games due to a broken collarbone and torn ACL. UVa needs him healthy. Maddox Marcellus filled in admirably for Robinson last year, and now they'll be paired as starters.

Defensive tackles Jason Hammond and Anthony Britton both enter their fourth seasons, and the Cavaliers expect Michigan transfer Brandyn Hillman to be the squad's next productive safety. At UVa, he'll step into the role previously occupied by Devin Neal Jr. last year and by Jonas Sanker in 2024. Both former UVa safeties led the team in tackles in those seasons. Fisher Camac (6-7, 253) is the Cavaliers' best pass-rusher.

SPECIALISTS Placekicker Will Bettridge and punter Daniel Sparks give UVa trusted fifth-year starters at those spots. Beebe and Jacquon Gibson are slated to handle returns.

FINAL ANALYSIS UVa set a school record with 11 wins last season, and Elliott's bunch will be a factor again because of its excellent O-line and deep backfield and because defensive coordinator John Rudzinski can mold his unit quickly. What could hurt the Hoos is if their wide receivers don't pan out and the passing game flops.

2025 RESULTS (11-3, 7-1 ACC)

Aug. 30	Coastal Carolina	W	48-7
Sept. 6	at NC State	L	31-35
Sept. 13	William & Mary	W	55-16
Sept. 20	Stanford	W	48-20
Sept. 26	Florida State (ot)	W	46-38
Oct. 4	at Louisville (ot)	W	30-27
Oct. 18	Washington State	W	22-20
Oct. 25	at North Carolina (ot)	W	17-16
Nov. 1	at Cal	W	31-21
Nov. 8	Wake Forest	L	9-16
Nov. 15	at Duke	W	34-17
Nov. 29	Virginia Tech	W	27-7
Dec. 6	vs. Duke # (ot)	L	20-27
Dec. 27	vs. Missouri %	W	13-7

#Charlotte %Gator Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Aug. 29	vs. NC State #
Sept. 12	Norfolk State
Sept. 19	vs. West Virginia %
Sept. 26	Delaware
Oct. 3	at Florida State
Oct. 10	Syracuse
Oct. 17	at SMU
Oct. 24	Duke
Oct. 31	at Wake Forest
Nov. 14	Cal
Nov. 21	North Carolina
Nov. 28	at Virginia Tech

% Charlotte, NC #Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

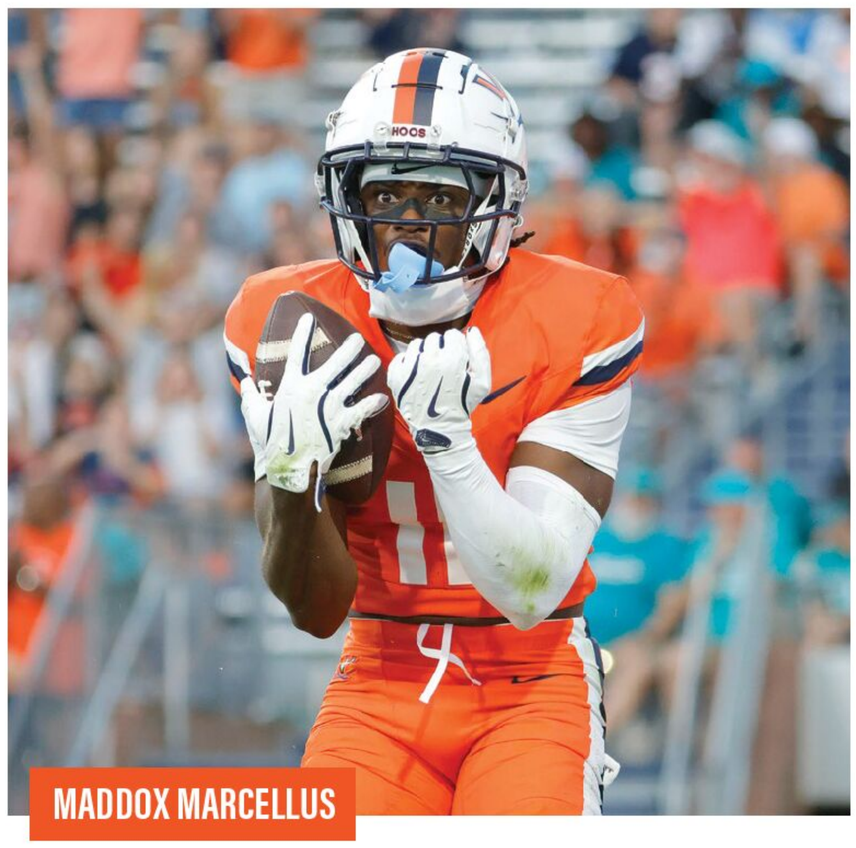
TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Dylan Cope, WR	★★★
2.	Dallas Brannon, LB	★★★
3.	Alex Dunn, CB	★★★
4.	Mikey Gildea, IOL	★★★
5.	Derek Uran, LB	★★★
6.	DaMari Carter, ATH	★★★
7.	Bull Richardson, DL	★★★
8.	Jayden Covil, CB	★★★
9.	Luke Hatfield, IOL	★★★
10.	Jack Rhodes, WR	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Tony Elliott • Record at School: 22-26 (4 years)
Career Record: 22-26 (4 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Des Kitchings
Defensive Coordinator: John Rudzinski • Location: Charlottesville, Va.
Stadium: Scott Stadium (61,500)



MADDOX MARCELLUS

SCOUTING THE CAVALIERS

"I'm a fan. Stock up on them. I've heard good things about their NIL and the way that they're structuring things. They've got a really unique incentive package for how they're gonna do stuff to be sustainable and not have to pay boatloads of money up front to anyone, even if they're a good player, but that it was still going to be able to incentivize guys to come while motivating them to get on the field. ... [Missouri transfer quarterback] Beau Pribula is a good complement to any QB room. I felt like he was a great add for them, especially considering the dual-threat ability they asked of their QB last year. Now that he has some experience, I think he'll take the next step, especially in the offense that they run."

— An opposing ACC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)

WR	11	Rico Flores Jr.* (Sr.)	84	Isaiah Robinson (So.)
WR	15	Dillon Newton-Short (So.)	18	Da'Shawn Martin* (Jr.)
WR	5	Kameron Courtney (Jr.)	19	Jacquon Gibson* (Sr.)
LT	**52**	**MCKALE BOLEY (SR.)**	72	Ben York (Jr.)
LG	**77**	**NOAH JOSEY (SR.)**	64	Cole Surber (Sr.)
C	**60**	**DRAKE METCALF (SR.)**	69	Ryan Brubaker* (Sr.)
RG	54	Makilan Thomas (Sr.)	65	Grant Ellinger (Jr.)
RT	71	Monroe Mills (Sr.)	79	Jon Adair (So.)
TE	9	Dakota Twitty (Sr.)	89	John Rogers (So.)
QB	7	Beau Pribula* (Sr.)	10	Eli Holstein* (Sr.)
RB	2	Peyton Lewis* (Jr.)	21	Jekail Middlebrook* (Sr.)

DEFENSE (5)

DE	16	Matthew Fobbs-White* (Sr.)	33	Nnanna Anyanwu* (Sr.)
DT	**91**	**JASON HAMMOND (SR.)**	44	Darrion Henry-Young* (Sr.)
DT	55	Anthony Britton (Sr.)	54	Zion Wilson* (Sr.)
DE	**14**	**FISHER CAMAC (SR.)**	94	Ezekiel Larry* (Sr.)
LB	**5**	**KAM ROBINSON (SR.)**	26	Caleb Hardy (Sr.)
LB	11	Maddox Marcellus (Sr.)	32	Landon Danley (Sr.)
SPUR	4	Corey Costner (So.)	23	Jaylen Jones* (Sr.)
CB	10	Jacobie Henderson* (Sr.)	9	Jam Jackson (Sr.)
CB	**2**	**DONAVON PLATT (SR.)**	20	Omillio Agard* (Jr.)
S	6	Brandyn Hillman* (Sr.)	18	Jalen McNair* (Sr.)
S	**30**	**ETHAN MINTER (JR.)**	8	Christian Ellis* (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	41	Will Bettridge (Sr.)	KR	28	Solomon Beebe* (Jr.)
P	38	Daniel Sparks (Sr.)	PR	19	Jacquon Gibson* (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

AMBER SEARLS-IMAGN IMAGES

KEMARI COPELAND

BRIAN BISHOP-IMAGN IMAGES

SCOUTING THE HOKIES

"The blueprint that [new head coach] James Franklin has had in his career from Vandy to Penn State translates very well to that league. Virginia Tech should be one of the top three programs in the ACC when done right. I'm excited to see what they do because I've got a ton of belief in the recruits they brought in and the infrastructure that's in place for them to be successful. ... The level of respect that I have for the humbleness and lack of ego that [former head coach] Brent Pry has to [stay on as defensive coordinator] is off the charts. I don't think enough can be said about how special and how difficult that kind of a move is. Being able to take the head coach duties off his plate again might provide better defensive production."

— An opposing ACC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (8)

WR	0	**AYDEN GREENE (SR.)**	15	Snook Peterkin (So.)
WR	3	Que'Sean Brown* (Jr.)	5	Marlion Jackson* (Sr.)
WR	2	**TAKYE HEATH (JR.)**	6	Keylen Adams (So.)
LT	70	Logan Howland* (Jr.)	72	Justin Terry* (So.)
LG	56	**LAYTH GHANNAM (JR.)**	54	Michael Troutman III (Fr.)
C	62	**KYLE ALTUNER (SO.)**	53	Tommy Ricard (So.)
RG	77	Brody Meadows (Sr.)	79	**JOHNNY GARRETT (SR.)**
RT	66	Montavious Cunningham (Sr.)	76	**AIDAN LYNCH (SO.)**
TE	85	Luke Reynolds* (Jr.)	82	**BENJI GOSNELL (SR.)**
QB	17	Ethan Grunkemeyer* (So.)	22	Bryce Baker* (Fr.)
RB	27	**MARCELLOUS HAWKINS (SR.)**	16	Jeffrey Overton Jr. (Fr.)

DEFENSE (5)

DE	42	Aycen Stevens (Jr.)	31	Jason Abbey (Jr.)
DT	13	**KEMARI COPELAND (SR.)**	99	Emmett Laws (So.)
DT	94	Elhadj Fall (Sr.)	45	Eric Mensah* (So.)
DE	37	Mylachi Williams* (So.)	40	Javion Hilson* (Fr.)
OLB	33	Keon Wylie* (Jr.)	12	Gabe Williams (So.)
ILB	3	Kaleb Spencer (Sr.)	30	Curtis Jones Jr.* (Jr.)
ILB	16	**NOAH CHAMBERS (SO.)**	41	George Ballance (Jr.)
CB	9	**ISAIAH BROWN-MURRAY (SR.)**	5	Joshua Clarke (So.)
CB	2	Jaquez White* (Jr.)	22	Kenny Woseley Jr.* (So.)
S	0	**QUENTIN REDDISH (SO.)**	6	Jordan Bass (Sr.)
S	11	**TYSON FLOWERS (SR.)**	14	Sheldon Robinson (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	17	John Love (Sr.)	KR	23 Thomas Williams (Jr.)
P	95	Nathan Totten* (Jr.)	PR	3 Que'Sean Brown* (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

VIRGINIA TECH HOKIES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 30 | ACC PREDICTION: 5 | 2025 RECORD: 3-9, 2-6 ACC

OFFENSE New head coach James Franklin has a familiar face leading his offense, bringing quarterback Ethan Grunkemeyer with him from Penn State. Though Grunkemeyer didn't ascend to a starting spot until after Franklin's ouster, he acquitted himself well, throwing for 777 yards, six touchdowns and no picks in the Nittany Lions' final four games.

He'll have some intriguing weapons, with Ayden Greene back as the top wideout and the shifty Que'Sean Brown (846 receiving yards, five TDs last year) transferring from Duke. Running back Marcellous Hawkins quietly ranked fifth in the ACC at 6.35 yards per carry last year, and Penn State transfer tight end Luke Reynolds is a former 5-star recruit.

As usual, it could come down to the offensive line, which struggled to protect the quarterback last year but should be better under the instruction of second-year position coach Matt Moore. Center Kyle Altuner locks down the middle, but every other spot feels up for grabs.

DEFENSE Meet the new boss, same as the old boss. Brent Pry is back with the school that fired him last September as head coach. He's reunited with Franklin in a coordinator role, a partnership that served both of them well in Happy Valley.

Weight room stud Kemari Copeland (7.5 tackles for a loss, 4.5 sacks in 2025) gives the Hokies a building block on the interior line, and the secondary is beefed up. Quentin Reddish returns from a shoulder injury to headline the safeties room, while Tech restocked at corner, adding Jaquez White (Troy) and Kenny Woseley Jr. (Penn State) as transfers and getting Joshua Clarke back from a torn ACL. Expect the pass defense to improve upon its national ranking of 81st nationally in yards allowed.

There are question marks at linebacker and on the front. Sophomore Noah Chambers has hard-hitting upside in the middle, but there are few proven playmakers other than Copeland in the front seven.

SPECIALISTS John Love returns as one of the nation's top placekickers, a two-time All-ACC honorable mention selection who has made 84.4% of his career field-goal attempts and has booted five from 50-plus in the past two years. Brown could kickstart a stagnant punt return.

FINAL ANALYSIS It's been 10 years since Virginia Tech has played for an ACC championship and 16 years since it has won one — far too long for a program of the Hokies' caliber. By fortuitous timing, a recruiting-savvy, proven winner from the mid-Atlantic happened to be available on the coaching market last fall. It might take Franklin more than a year to make the Hokies a contender, but with his history and Tech's recent cash infusion to athletics, the days of going 3-9 feel over.

2025 RESULTS (3-9, 2-6 ACC)

Aug. 31	vs. South Carolina #	L	11-24
Sept. 6	Vanderbilt	L	20-44
Sept. 13	Old Dominion	L	26-45
Sept. 20	Wofford	W	38-6
Sept. 27	at NC State	W	23-21
Oct. 4	Wake Forest	L	23-30
Oct. 11	at Georgia Tech	L	20-35
Oct. 24	Cal (ot)	W	42-34
Nov. 1	Louisville	L	16-28
Nov. 15	at Florida State	L	14-34
Nov. 22	Miami (Fla.)	L	17-34
Nov. 29	at Virginia	L	7-27

#Atlanta

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	VMI
Sept. 12	Old Dominion
Sept. 19	at Maryland
Sept. 26	at Boston College
Oct. 2	Pitt
Oct. 10	at Cal
Oct. 17	Georgia Tech
Oct. 24	at Clemson
Nov. 7	at SMU
Nov. 14	Stanford
Nov. 20	at Miami (Fla.)
Nov. 28	Virginia

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Terry Wiggins, LB	★★★★
2.	Tyson Harley, EDGE	★★★★
3.	Pierce Petersohn, TE	★★★★
4.	Zaevion Cleveland, CB	★★★★
5.	Buddy Wegdam, OT	★★★★
6.	Messiah Mickens, RB	★★★
7.	Marlen Bright, OT	★★★
8.	Mathieu Lamah, LB	★★★
9.	T-Ron Richardson Jr., DL	★★★
10.	Troy Huhn, QB	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: James Franklin • Record at School: First Season
Career Record: 128-60 (14+ years) • Offensive Coordinator: Ty Howle
Defensive Coordinator: Brent Pry • Location: Blacksburg, Va.
Stadium: Lane Stadium (65,632)

WAKE FOREST DEMON DEACONS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 53 | ACC PREDICTION: 12 | 2025 RECORD: 9-4, 4-4 ACC

OFFENSE Gone is a quarterback duo that could be erratic; in steps a quarterback who was erratic for a different ACC team. Gio Lopez is set to reunite with Rob Ezell, his offensive coordinator at South Alabama in 2024 and current coordinator at Wake Forest. The 2024 version of Lopez was responsible for more than 3,000 yards of offense and 25 touchdowns. And if Lopez can recapture that form under Ezell's tutelage, his rough one-season stint at North Carolina will be forgotten.

Wake Forest has to solve the puzzle of who's blocking in front of him. Clinton Richard is a good building block, and there's no shortage of options up front — but there's work to be done in figuring out the top five.

The Deacons also have to replace plenty of lost production at wide receiver, where only Carlos Hernandez returns, and at running back, where Demond Claiborne is a significant loss. But there's plenty of speed and potential with transfer wide receivers Ny Carr, Chase Tyler, Wondame Davis Jr. and Kam Shanks.

DEFENSE This unit was the strength of last year's team, and that's probably the case again. Wake Forest returns both starting ends, Gabe Kirschke and Langston Hardy, who combined for 12 sacks and 26 tackles for a loss last year. There's also plenty of experience returning to the defensive tackle and linebacker spots.

On the back end, Davaughn Patterson is a budding star at nickel. Replacing two cornerbacks will be tough, but there are plenty of options, both with returning players and transfers. Getting Rushaun Tongue back from injury will help offset the loss of program pillar Nick Andersen.

SPECIALISTS Punting was a glaring issue last year. Ethan Hyams, from Australia, will get a crack at solidifying the position. Connor Calvert was excellent as a redshirt freshman kicker. He made 18-of-22 field-goal attempts, including a walk-off winner against SMU. Wake Forest was dynamic in the return game and should have no shortage of options despite losing Chris Barnes.

FINAL ANALYSIS Wake Forest won more games in head coach Jake Dickert's first season (nine) than it had in the previous two seasons combined (four in each). Following up an impressive first season with an equal or better year will be tough — and might be impossible if Lopez is the same rattled QB he was for most of last season.

Unlike many Wake teams of old, though, the Deacons can rely on their defense. On paper, this team checks all the boxes — experience, depth, size, speed — and should be able to grind out some close wins.

2025 RESULTS (9-4, 4-4 ACC)

Aug. 29	Kennesaw State	W	10-9
Sept. 6	Western Carolina	W	42-10
Sept. 11	NC State	L	24-34
Sept. 27	Georgia Tech (ot)	L	29-30
Oct. 4	at Virginia Tech	W	30-23
Oct. 11	at Oregon State	W	39-14
Oct. 25	SMU	W	13-12
Nov. 1	at Florida State	L	7-42
Nov. 8	at Virginia	W	16-9
Nov. 15	North Carolina	W	28-12
Nov. 22	Delaware	W	52-14
Nov. 29	at Duke	L	32-49
Jan. 2	vs. Mississippi State #	W	43-29

#Duke's Mayo Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 3	Akron
Sept. 12	at Purdue
Sept. 18	Miami (Fla.)
Sept. 26	at Louisville
Oct. 3	Stanford
Oct. 10	at NC State
Oct. 17	at Cal
Oct. 31	Virginia
Nov. 7	Merrimack
Nov. 14	at SMU
Nov. 21	at Georgia Tech
Nov. 28	Duke

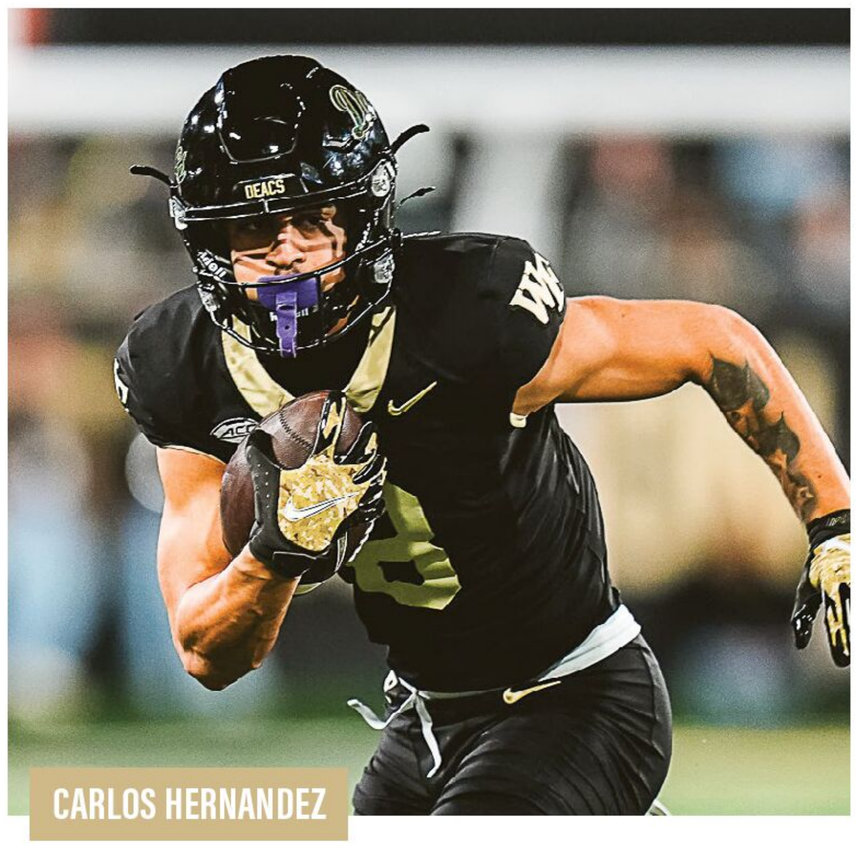
TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Grant Lawless, QB	★★★★
2.	Kyndall McCaleb, RB	★★★★
3.	Micheal Ahoua, LB	★★★★
4.	Lucas Smalls-Allen, DL	★★★★
5.	Monroe Partin, ATH	★★★★
6.	Langston Hogg, IOL	★★★
7.	Sefa Sackey, EDGE	★★★
8.	Deuce Lawrence, RB	★★★
9.	Mahamadou Siby, CB	★★★
10.	Walker Bryson, ATH	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Jake Dickert • Record at School: 9-4 (1 year)
Career Record: 32-24 (5 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Rob Ezell
Defensive Coordinator: Scottie Hazelton • Location: Winston-Salem, N.C.
Stadium: Allegacy Federal Credit Union Stadium (31,500)



CARLOS HERNANDEZ

SCOUTING THE DEMON DEACONS

"They're in a really good situation financially. They raised all of this money for new facilities right as NIL was starting to percolate. That's allowed them to be incredibly competitive with paying guys. They'd have third-string guys making $150K. I know now, they're a lot more proactive with giving money to guys who aren't reaching out than they were even a few years ago. ... I've heard a lot of good things about [new head coach] Jake Dickert. People seem to really like what he's doing. He seems incredibly genuine. He's high energy, and he brings other high-energy, genuine guys around him. Their defensive line coach, T.J. Hollowell, he's as good as they get in the business. I say stock up on them. I wouldn't bet against those guys."

— An opposing ACC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (2)

WR	9	Chase Tyler* (So.)	10	Jack Foley (Fr.)
WR	**8**	**CARLOS HERNANDEZ (SR.)**	5	Kam Shanks* (Jr.)
WR	11	Ny Carr* (So.)	7	Wondame Davis Jr.* (So.)
LT	67	Elliot Demaine (Fr.)	**73**	**GEORGE STEIH (JR.)**
LG	65	Clinton Richard (So.)	64	Ryan Berger* (Jr.)
C	70	Will Way* (Jr.)	51	Devin McRae (Jr.)
RG	74	John Ohnegian* (Sr.)	62	Jaishaun Offutt (Fr.)
RT	55	Tolu Olajide* (Sr.)	72	Aidan Martin (Fr.)
TE	12	Kamrean Johnson (Sr.)	81	Landon Morris* (Sr.)
QB	3	Gio Lopez* (Jr.)	6	Steele Pizzella (Fr.)
RB	4	Ty Clark III (Jr.)	1	KD Daniels* (So.)

DEFENSE (8)

DE	10	GABE KIRSCHKE (SR.)	14	Tyler Walton (Jr.)
DT	94	ZACH LOHAVICHAN (SR.)	99	Josiah Pratt (Fr.)
DT	52	DALLAS AFALAVA (SR.)	55	Kadear Dembele (Fr.)
DE	11	LANGSTON HARDY (SR.)	9	Camden Hardy (So.)
MLB	43	Frank Cusano (So.)	7	Buom Jock* (Jr.)
OLB	21	AIDEN HALL (SR.)	23	Vincent Firenze* (Jr.)
CB	2	Deuce Blades II* (Sr.)	27	TRAVON WEST (JR.)
CB	13	Ashaad Williams (Sr.)	4	Sascha Garcia (So.)
NB	5	DAVAUGHN PATTERSON (JR.)	17	Zamari Stevenson (Sr.)
S	6	Rushaun Tongue (So.)	22	Myles Turpin (So.)
S	8	BRAYLON JOHNSON (JR.)	25	Joshua Patterson* (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	90	Connor Calvert (So.)	KR	35	Koredell Bartley (So.)
P	45	Ethan Hyams (Fr.)	PR	5	Kam Shanks* (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

WAKE FOREST ATHLETICS VIA IMAGN IMAGES

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AMERICAN PREVIEW

PREDICTED ORDER OF FINISH

1	**NAVY**	MIDSHIPMEN
2	**MEMPHIS**	TIGERS
3	**UTSA**	ROADRUNNERS
4	**ARMY**	BLACK KNIGHTS
5	**EAST CAROLINA**	PIRATES
6	**SOUTH FLORIDA**	BULLS
7	**TULANE**	GREEN WAVE
8	**TEMPLE**	OWLS
9	**FLORIDA ATLANTIC**	OWLS
10	**TULSA**	GOLDEN HURRICANE
11	**NORTH TEXAS**	MEAN GREEN
12	**RICE**	OWLS
13	**UAB**	BLAZERS
14	**CHARLOTTE**	49ERS

AMERICAN CHAMPIONSHIP

NAVY OVER MEMPHIS

ALL-AMERICAN CONFERENCE TEAM

FIRST-TEAM OFFENSE

QB	OWEN McCOWN	UTSA
RB	JAHIEM WHITE	North Texas
RB	JAMAURI McCLURE	Tulane
AP	WILL HENDERSON III	UTSA
WR	EASTON MESSER	Florida Atlantic
WR	DAVID AMADOR II	UTSA
WR	BROCK SPALDING	East Carolina
TE	PETER CLARKE	Temple
C	BRADY SMALL	Army
OL	ADAM LEPKOWSKI	UAB
OL	CAM NICHOLS	Navy
OL	ERIC KING	Temple
OL	VINCENT FIACABLE	Florida Atlantic

FIRST-TEAM DEFENSE

DL	J'MOND TAPP	Memphis
DL	CJ DOGGETTE JR.	Florida Atlantic
DL	JACK BOUSUM	Army
DL	JASIYAH ROBINSON	East Carolina
LB	MarcANTHONY PARKER	Navy
LB	LEON HART JR.	Florida Atlantic
LB	CURLY ORDONEZ	Temple
LB	MIKE MONTGOMERY	Memphis
DB	ELIJAH GREEN	Tulsa
DB	ZACH WILLIAMS	Tulsa
DB	JACK TCHIENCHOU	Tulane
DB	IAN FOSTER	Memphis

FIRST-TEAM SPECIALISTS

K	NICO GRAMATICA	South Florida
P	CAILE HOGAN	UTSA
KR	JAYLIN LUCAS	Tulane
PR	EASTON MESSER	Florida Atlantic

BOWL PROJECTIONS

Cure: East Carolina vs. Western Michigan

Xbox: Old Dominion vs. Utah State

Gasparilla: Memphis vs. Georgia Tech

Puerto Rico: South Florida vs. Fresno State

Military: Temple vs. Wake Forest

Fenway: Army vs. NC State

New Mexico: UTSA vs. New Mexico

Armed Forces: Navy vs. Arizona State

JOIN COLLEGE FOOTBALL EXPERT STEVEN LASSAN AT ATHLONSPORTS.COM FOR A LOOK AT SECOND- AND THIRD-TEAM SELECTIONS

COORDINATOR CAROUSEL

ARMY
Defense: New: Daryl Dixon, Scot Sloan
Old: Nate Woody

EAST CAROLINA
Offense: New: Jordan Davis
Old: John David Baker
Defense: New: Jordon Hankins, Roy Tesh; Old: Josh Aldridge

MEMPHIS
Offense: New: Kevin Decker, David Weeks; Old: Tim Cramsey
Defense: New: Lance Guidry
Old: Jordon Hankins

NAVY
Defense: New: Eric Lewis, Ricky Brown
Old: P.J. Volker

NORTH TEXAS
Offense: New: Neal Brown
Old: Jordan Davis
Defense: New: Matt Powledge, Bradley Dale Peveto; Old: Skyler Cassity

SOUTH FLORIDA
Offense: New: Tim Beck
Old: Kodi Burns, Joel Gordon
Defense: New: Josh Aldridge
Old: Todd Orlando

TULANE
Offense: New: Russ Callaway
Old: Joe Craddock
Defense: New: Tayler Polk, Nate Fuqua
Old: Greg Gasparato

TULSA
Offense: New: Kevin Barbay, Ty Darlington; Old: Brad Robbins

UAB
Defense: New: Todd Grantham
Old: Steve Russ

UTSA
Offense: New: Rick Bowie
Old: Justin Burke

OWEN McCOWN, UTSA
MIKE MONTGOMERY, MEMPHIS

FROM LEFT: DANNY WILD-IMAGN IMAGES; CHRIS DAY/THE COMMERCIAL APPEAL

TOP TRANSFERS

	NAME	POS.	SCHOOL	FORMER SCHOOL
1.	**J'Mond Tapp**	DL	Memphis	Southern Miss
	Tapp racked up 7.5 sacks and earned all-conference honors last season in the Sun Belt.			
2.	**Jahiem White**	RB	North Texas	West Virginia
	White has big-play potential and Power 4 conference experience.			
3.	**Michael Van Buren Jr.**	QB	South Florida	LSU
	Van Buren started a dozen games in the SEC; his best football may still be ahead of him.			
4.	**C.J. Hicks**	DL	South Florida	Ohio State
	Hicks is a Big Ten veteran who could make an impact off the edge for the Bulls.			
5.	**Ian Foster**	DB	Memphis	Southern Miss
	Foster is a ball hawk who's on his third Charles Huff-coached team in three seasons.			
6.	**Kyran Duhon**	DL	Tulsa	Oklahoma State
	Duhon will try to return to his freshman form, when he racked up seven sacks at UTEP.			
7.	**Marcus Stokes**	QB	Memphis	West Florida
	Stokes was named a finalist for the Div. II Harlon Hill Trophy.			
8.	**Ashton Gray**	RB	East Carolina	North Texas
	He made the most of his touches last season before he ran wild in North Texas' bowl game.			
9.	**Zeon Chriss-Gremillion**	QB	Tulane	Houston
	Chriss-Gremillion returns to the state of Louisiana armed with starting experience.			
10.	**Jaxon Smolik**	QB	Temple	Penn State
	Smolik gets his first shot at starting in head coach K.C. Keeler's offense.			

RECRUITING RANKINGS BY SCHOOL

1. Temple (65)
2. Tulane (67)
3. UTSA (79)
4. Memphis (82)
5. East Carolina (94)
6. Rice (99)
7. South Florida (103)
8. Tulsa (104)
9. Charlotte (108)
10. Florida Atlantic (119)
11. UAB (133)
12. Navy (134)
13. Army (136)
14. North Texas (140)

Rankings per Rivals; National ranking in parentheses

GAMES TO WATCH

Aug. 29	Memphis at UNLV
Sept. 12	Memphis at Boise State
Sept. 12	South Florida at Army
Oct. 8	South Florida at UTSA
Oct. 17	Navy at UTSA
Oct. 22	East Carolina at Memphis
Oct. 24	UTSA at Tulane
Oct. 31	Navy vs. Notre Dame (Foxborough, MA)
Nov. 21	Memphis at Navy
Nov. 21	East Carolina at Army
Nov. 27	Tulane at South Florida
Dec. 12	Army vs. Navy (East Rutherford, NJ)

TOP 10 RECRUITS

	NAME	POS.	SCHOOL	RATING	NAT. RANK
1.	Tylan George	IOL	Tulane	★★★	466
2.	Jordyn Crites	DL	Tulane	★★★	469
3.	Jamarcea Plater	RB	Tulsa	★★★	599
4.	Elijah Fernandez	LB	Memphis	★★★	668
5.	Terande Spencer	EDGE	East Carolina	★★★	698
6.	Jude Okeleke	DL	Temple	★★★	709
7.	Jordan Harrison	IOL	South Florida	★★★	805
8.	Aiden Martin	OT	Tulane	★★★	860
9.	Eric Perry	RB	Memphis	★★★	898
10.	Asaad Chapman	CB	UTSA	★★★	10*

*Rankings per Rivals industry ranking; *Junior college transfer/JUCO ranking*

ARMY BLACK KNIGHTS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 74 | AMERICAN PREDICTION: 4 | 2025 RECORD: 7-6, 4-4 AMERICAN

OFFENSE How does quarterback Cale Hellums top his 2025 season? Hellums, who was third on the preseason depth chart, finished second in the nation with 304 carries and tied for third with 18 rushing touchdowns, while powering for 1,223 yards.

Army found its featured back in Godspower Nwawuihe, who rushed for 171 yards and two long TDs in the Fenway Bowl win over UConn. Nwawuihe's quarterback background will allow Army to use the sophomore in a variety of formations. Briggs Bartosh stepped away from football due to a neck injury, hurting Army's big-play ability.

The offensive line will always be the team's heartbeat. Army returns four starters up front, including senior center Brady Small, who has started all 39 games since entering the academy.

DEFENSE Army will have a fresh look with eight new starters and a first-year defensive coordinator in longtime assistant Daryl Dixon, who replaced Nate Woody, now at Cincinnati.

Senior nose tackle Kody Harris-Miller enters his third season as a starter and anchors Army's most experienced defensive unit. Junior end Jack Bousum has flashed pro potential, and senior end Dillon Stowers got better and better last season.

Who replaces the production and leadership of captains and graduated inside linebackers Kalib Fortner and Andon Thomas may not be decided until fall camp. Bryson Banks and Elijah Walton should get the first shot. Cornerback Jaydan Mayes, Army's lone returning starter in the secondary, needs to have a big season.

SPECIALISTS Dawson Jones' 15 made field goals were the most by an Army placekicker since 2010, and the junior made his last five field-goal attempts, including a walk-off game-winner against Air Force. Senior punter James Wagenseller, who averaged 43.1 yards last season, is a field-position game-changer.

FINAL ANALYSIS Competing for a conference title isn't out of the question, with the offensive experience that Army is returning. Hellums had 40% of Army's carries last season and needs to share the touches. The team also needs someone to fill the hole left by the departure of Noah Short, who compiled 1,009 yards from scrimmage last year. The Black Knights are younger on defense than in years past, with sophomores Banks and cornerback Julian Porter playing important roles. The inexperience at inside linebacker is also concerning. A home game in Week 2 against South Florida will be a good barometer for whether Army will be a contender.

2025 RESULTS (7-6, 4-4 AMERICAN)

Aug. 29	Tarleton State (ot)	L	27-30
Sept. 6	at Kansas State	W	24-21
Sept. 20	North Texas (ot)	L	38-45
Sept. 25	at East Carolina	L	6-28
Oct. 4	at UAB	W	31-13
Oct. 11	Charlotte	W	24-7
Oct. 18	at Tulane	L	17-24
Nov. 1	at Air Force	W	20-17
Nov. 8	Temple	W	14-13
Nov. 22	Tulsa	L	25-26
Nov. 29	at UTSA	W	27-24
Dec. 13	vs. Navy #	L	16-17
Dec. 27	vs. UConn %	W	41-16

#Baltimore %Fenway Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	Bryant
Sept. 12	South Florida
Sept. 26	at Temple
Oct. 3	at Louisiana Tech
Oct. 10	Tulane
Oct. 17	Florida Atlantic
Oct. 23	at Tulsa
Oct. 31	at Memphis
Nov. 7	Air Force
Nov. 21	East Carolina
Nov. 28	at Rice
Dec. 12	vs. Navy #

#East Rutherford, NJ

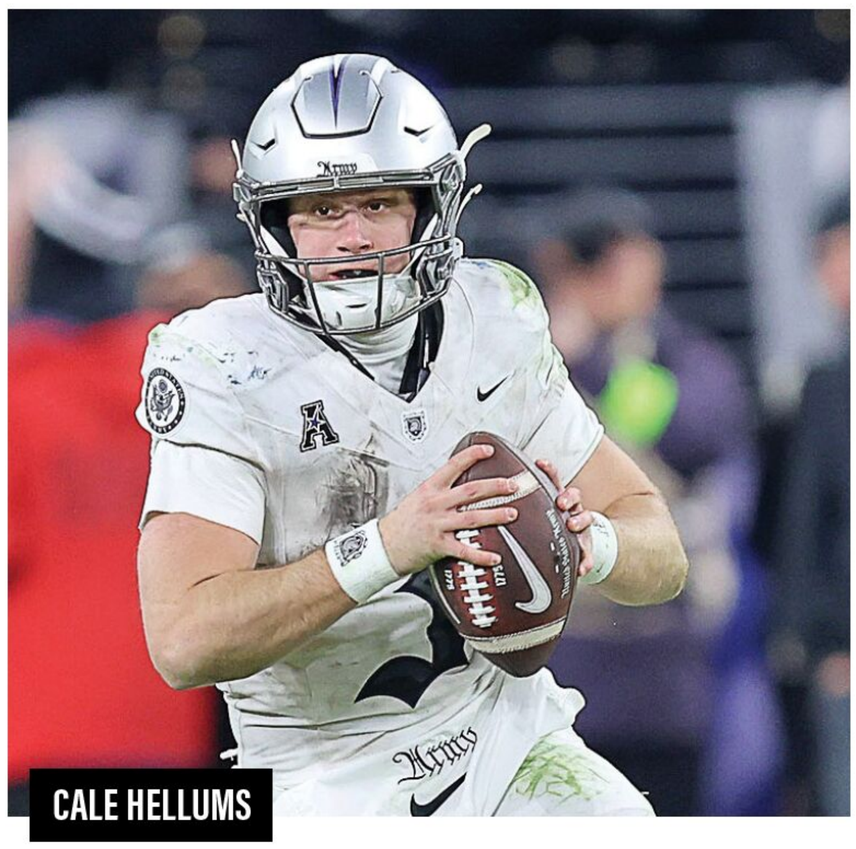
TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Phillip Goodrich, LB	★★★
2.	Maverick Diede, IOL	★★★
3.	Deion Miller, LB	★★★
4.	Kingston Jackson, IOL	★★★
5.	Hans Pederson, EDGE	★★★
6.	Trenton Curliss, TE	★★★
7.	Carter Glab, IOL	★★★
8.	Cayton Kubah-Taylor, S	★★★
9.	Keoki Becerra, EDGE	★★★
10.	Omeiza Daniyan, LB	★★★

*Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Jeff Monken • Record at School: 89-63 (12 years)
Career Record: 127-79 (16 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Cody Worley
Defensive Coordinators: Daryl Dixon, Scot Sloan • Location: West Point, N.Y.
Stadium: Michie Stadium (30,000)



CALE HELLUMS

SCOUTING THE BLACK KNIGHTS

"It may be wrong to say this, but everyone wants them to win because it's the military. People want them to win because they're doing it for America. [Service academies] are America's team, not the Dallas Cowboys. But for us, that's what's fun about playing them. Our backs are against the wall. And we know when we get a lead against them, they're not gonna bend or break because that's what they train for. ... When those guys leave practice, they go train for war. You always gotta remember that. They play clean, they play the right way. They play physical. ... They're getting who they get. There's no transfer portal, there's nothing for them. They continue to run the same schemes and win 9-10 games a year, and it's like, how?"

— An opposing American assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (8)

WR	84	**BRADY ANDERSON (JR.)**	11	Tobi Olawole (Sr.)
LT	58	**HENRY APPLETON (SR.)**	78	Xavier Archawski (Jr.)
LG	75	Kyle Kloska (Sr.)	72	Lane Parks (Sr.)
C	51	**BRADY SMALL (SR.)**	67	Wes Shaw (Jr.)
RG	71	**PAOLO GENNARELLI (SR.)**	60	Sam Waters (Jr.)
RT	74	**TEDDY WILLIAMS (SR.)**	56	Tyler Lee (Sr.)
TE	44	**PARKER POLOSKEY (SR.)**	80	Brian Dyer (Sr.)
QB	3	**CALE HELLUMS (SR.)**	6	Bryson Luter (So.)
SB	32	Stroman Bridges (So.)	2	Aden Self (Jr.)
SB	27	**SAMARI HOWARD (SR.)**	1	Zach Mundell (Sr.)
RB	7	Godspower Nwawuihe (So.)	33	Jake Rendina (Sr.)

DEFENSE (3)

DE	99	**JACK BOUSUM (JR.)**	94	Javon Smith (Jr.)
DT	52	**KODY HARRIS-MILLER (SR.)**	91	Sean Donovan (Jr.)
DE	96	Dillon Stowers (Sr.)	97	Cael Newton (Jr.)
ILB	48	Bryson Banks (So.)	19	Jaquavious Moss (So.)
ILB	42	Elijah Walton (Jr.)	29	Kai Woolfolk (So.)
OLB	47	Noah Nixon (Sr.)	49	Christian Yousefzadeh (Sr.)
APACHE	10	Cole Searight (Jr.)	4	CJ Martin (Jr.)
CB	7	**JAYDAN MAYES (SR.)**	17	Jaxon Hammond (Sr.)
CB	8	Julian Porter (So.)	9	Rob Houston (Jr.)
S	3	Stephen Nnadozie (Sr.)	11	David Thom-Rogers (So.)
S	13	Caleb Williams (Jr.)	32	Christopher Williams (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	95	Dawson Jones (Jr.)	KR	23	Lloyd Benson III (Sr.)
P	47	James Wagenseller (Sr.)	PR	23	Lloyd Benson III (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

DANNY WILD-IMAGN IMAGES

KADIN SCHMITZ

SCOUTING THE 49ERS

"I think [head coach] Tim Albin is one of the best, so if he believes in his team enough to double down, that's scary. But they had one of the worst rosters in college football last year. They really didn't flip it, so you kind of wonder if they believe in it. When Albin was at Ohio, those teams were just so good, and I know their offensive coordinator [Todd Fitch] seems like a great coach. Obviously, it helps that he's been doing it for a while. ... What's scary for us facing them after a year like what they had is that our players could go into that game thinking it's a layup, but s—, all of a sudden ... because that's a good staff."

— An opposing American assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (2)

WR	14	Adam Hopkins IV (Jr.)	80	Jeremiah Hoffman (Fr.)
WR	1	Jaden Barnes* (Sr.)	89	Derrick Eley (So.)
WR	2	Jaylen Hampton (So.)	4	Tank Boston* (So.)
LT	74	J'Ven Williams* (Jr.)	54	Isaac Sikes-Rasby (Fr.)
LG	67	Dom Silvia (So.)	57	Luke Sandy* (Sr.)
C	65	Nic Cruji* (Sr.)	76	Isaiah Bullerdick (Sr.)
RG	61	Reginhard Pierre-Nau* (Jr.)	66	Omarion Davis (Sr.)
RT	**75**	**KRISTOS FERNANDEZ (SR.)**	55	Mathias Nielsen* (Sr.)
TE	**17**	**GUS MCGEE (SR.)**	3	Logan Mauldin* (Sr.)
QB	9	Cole Gonzales* (Sr.)	15	Conner Harrell (Sr.)
RB	24	Jariel Cobb (So.)	21	Henry Rutledge (Sr.)

DEFENSE (4)

DE	7	DJ Burgess (Sr.)	**2**	**JAYLON JOHNSON (SR.)**
DT	95	Devin Ancrum* (Fr.)	88	D'Nas White* (So.)
DT	**51**	**JAMARRION SOLOMON (SR.)**	15	Ayo Tifase (Sr.)
DE	9	Curtis Simpson (So.)	85	Caleb Irving* (So.)
ILB	**19**	**KADIN SCHMITZ (SR.)**	30	Stellan Bowman (So.)
ILB	13	Gavin Willis (Sr.)	36	Parker Startz (So.)
CB	4	Tradarius Smith* (Jr.)	1	Jameel Croft Jr.* (Jr.)
CB	11	DeQuinder Williams II (So.)	**12**	**CJ CLINKSCALES JR. (SR.)**
HUSKY	0	Collin Gill (Jr.)	28	Cornell Allen (So.)
S	3	Dy'Lon Womack (So.)	20	Zayden Laing-Taylor* (So.)
S	16	Shamar McIntosh* (So.)	6	Nireek Sharpe* (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	84	Aiden Bui (Fr.)	KR	21 Henry Rutledge (Sr.)
P	95	Bronson Long (Sr.)	PR	1 Jaden Barnes* (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

CHARLOTTE 49ERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 127 | AMERICAN PREDICTION: 14 | 2025 RECORD: 1-11, 0-8 AMERICAN

OFFENSE Charlotte posted its worst offensive output in program history last season, scoring only 14.3 points per game in the first year under head coach Tim Albin and offensive coordinator Todd Fitch. The staff has prioritized beefing up the offensive line and identifying reliable running backs, headlined by the return of Jariel Cobb and Henry Rutledge.

With starting quarterback Conner Harrell missing much of last season and being held out of team periods this spring due to a knee injury, the QB battle has reopened. Transfer Cole Gonzales, formerly at Pitt and FCS Western Carolina, saw plenty of reps in the spring, with the battle for the starting spot coming down to Harrell's health and how fast Gonzales can pick up Fitch's system.

The offense can only be better, and it all begins up front, where transfers J'Ven Williams, Nic Cruji and Reginhard Pierre-Nau are slated to start.

DEFENSE Charlotte's defense returns plenty of familiar faces in the front seven but will see a completely new crop of starters in the secondary. Linebacker Kadin Schmitz is the leading returning tackler with 66, along with two interceptions and two forced fumbles last season. Schmitz and Mike linebacker Gavin Willis lead the defense, with the latter wearing the helmet mic and communicating with defensive coordinator Nate Faanes.

The return of edges DJ Burgess and Curtis Simpson is huge for Faanes, as the group struggled to rush the passer last season due to injuries. Collin Gill and Dy'Lon Womack are expected to take on significantly bigger roles in the secondary, an area that derailed the defense a season ago.

The talent level on the defense is undoubtedly a step above last season's group, but Albin and Faanes will need a good stroke of injury luck for the unit to reach its full potential.

SPECIALISTS Charlotte has only one kicker on the roster — redshirt freshman Aiden Bui. The expectation is that the team will add at least one more ahead of the season. Bronson Long is expected to serve as the punter, with Pitt transfer Henry Searcy manning the long-snapper position. The return game gets a huge jolt with Rutledge returning for his final year, plus the addition of Jaden Barnes, an Appalachian State transfer.

FINAL ANALYSIS Albin needs a turnaround in Year 2 — which he has been known for in stops at North Dakota State and Ohio. There's some added pressure with new athletic director Kevin White joining the fold following the firing of Mike Hill, who hired Albin.

Albin focused on depth in the portal, but the roster itself doesn't appear much more talented than it did in 2025. If Fitch's offense continues to be stagnant, expect a change there at the conclusion of the season.

2025 RESULTS (1-11, 0-8 AMERICAN)

Aug. 29	Appalachian State	L	11-34
Sept. 6	North Carolina	L	3-20
Sept. 13	Monmouth	W	42-35
Sept. 18	Rice	L	17-28
Oct. 3	at South Florida	L	26-54
Oct. 11	at Army	L	7-24
Oct. 18	Temple	L	14-49
Oct. 24	North Texas	L	20-54
Nov. 8	at East Carolina	L	22-48
Nov. 15	UTSA	L	7-28
Nov. 22	at Georgia	L	3-35
Nov. 29	at Tulane	L	0-27

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	The Citadel
Sept. 12	at Ole Miss
Sept. 19	at App State
Sept. 26	Louisiana
Oct. 3	Memphis
Oct. 10	at North Texas
Oct. 17	at Temple
Oct. 30	Tulane
Nov. 7	at UAB
Nov. 14	East Carolina
Nov. 21	at Tulsa
Nov. 28	Navy

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Jaylen White, QB	★★★
2.	Mason McGill, IOL	★★★
3.	Jerry Wall III, LB	★★★
4.	Max Jansenvanvuren, EDGE	★★★
5.	Mikey Domanik, LB	★★★
6.	Amar Harper, OT	★★★
7.	Colin Bussey, DL	★★★
8.	Cody Taylor, IOL	★★★
9.	La'Trell Sellers, LB	★★★
10.	Josh Hines, S	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Tim Albin • Record at School: 1-11 (1 years) • Career Record: 59-38 (8 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Todd Fitch
Defensive Coordinator: Nate Faanes • Location: Charlotte, N.C. • Stadium: Jerry Richardson Stadium (15,314)

CHARLOTTE SID

EAST CAROLINA PIRATES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 75 | AMERICAN PREDICTION: 5 | 2025 RECORD: 9-4, 6-2 AMERICAN

OFFENSE Two veteran quarterbacks battled all spring, and head coach Blake Harrell likely won't declare a winner until the opener. Texas Tech transfer Mitch Griffis has slightly more experience, but ex-Miami Hurricane Emory Williams, at 6-foot-5, 225, is from QB central casting.

New offensive coordinator Jordan Davis lit up scoreboards at North Texas, and he has a deep wide receiver unit. Returning starter Brock Spalding is back alongside North Texas transfer Landon Sides, who had 88 career catches for 1,092 yards in Davis' offense. FCS Furman import Ja'Keith Hamilton had 40 grabs and five scores while averaging 13.6 yards per reception last year, and there's former Miami (Fla.) slot speedster Ray Ray Joseph, who projects in the return game, too.

Running back TJ Engleman Jr. returns after averaging 5.2 yards per carry last season. Transfers Ashton Gray (North Texas) and Michael Allen (Marshall) should hit the ground running, too. Gray had 152 yards and two scores in the New Mexico Bowl.

All-Conference USA performer Brandon Best, a Kennesaw State transfer, will step right into a depleted line. Southern Miss transfer Hayes Creel is solid, and Ethan Kramer brings 29 starts from FCS Northern Arizona. Experienced returnee Bryce Weaver impressed in the spring.

DEFENSE New defensive coordinator Jordon Hankins must replace a lot of splash plays up front. ECU was fourth with 7.8 tackles for a loss per game in 2025 and 26th nationally in rushing defense (120.3 ypg). Jasiyah Robinson is the only starter back up front. He had five sacks and has fellow veteran leaders Rion Roseborough and Preston Carr alongside him.

Tackling machine DJ Johnson Jr. anchors a linebacking crew with experience and potential. Crews Law, a transfer from Memphis who arrived with Hankins, should help, too. On the backline, nickel Kevon Merrell returns. FIU transfer Ashton Levells-Mitchell and talented Appalachian State addition Zyeir Gamble plug right in to keep the secondary tip-top.

SPECIALISTS Senior Andrew Conrad, the primary placekicker in 2023-24, takes over again this fall. He has hit 36-of-51 career field-goal attempts and tied an NCAA record with five successful field goals of 40-plus yards in a 2023 game. The punting unit depends on the solid foot of Australian Tomas O'Halloran, who averaged 42.1 yards on his 21 boots.

FINAL ANALYSIS The portal swept away lots of star power off another ECU bowl team, but don't be fooled. The Pirates are sneaky good. Guys who have played significant time without necessarily racking up starts are all over the roster. Harrell is 14-5 since taking the helm, and he's the architect of a sack-happy defense and great team culture in Greenville.

BROCK SPALDING

SCOUTING THE PIRATES

"That's always a tough game for us. They're very comfortable and very good at what they do. They definitely create some issues defensively the way that they aggressively fit the run and with how aggressive they are on the back end. ... Whatever [head coach Blake Harrell] is doing behind closed doors, they're believing in it. Over the years, that program has been very well-funded. I think it's one of those situations where they have a history of success, and that helps them. They're a recognizable brand. For them, the next step is to win a conference championship and really take that to another level. I hope that they don't figure that out this year."

— An opposing American assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (1)					
WR	25	Landon Sides* (Sr.)	21	Jeremiah Melvin* (So.)
WR	**10**	**BROCK SPALDING (SR.)**	11	Ray Ray Joseph* (Jr.)
WR	80	Ty Johnson (So.)	19	Ja'Keith Hamilton* (Jr.)
LT	71	Bryce Weaver (Jr.)	66	Marleo Neolien (Jr.)
LG	73	Karson Jones (Jr.)	69	Kendall Walton (Fr.)
C	58	Brandon Best* (Sr.)	73	Carson Jones (Jr.)
RG	55	Ethan Kramer* (Sr.)	68	Tre Hardison (Sr.)
RT	75	Hayes Creel* (Sr.)	72	Christian Harris* (Jr.)
TE	88	Ismael Smith Flores (Jr.)	89	Kanen Hamlett* (Sr.)
QB	12	Mitch Griffis* (Sr.)	11	Emory Williams* (Jr.)
RB	23	Ashton Gray* (So.)	20	TJ Engleman Jr. (So.)
DEFENSE (2)				
DE	**8**	**JASIYAH ROBINSON (SR.)**	35	Kieran Davis (Jr.)
NT	44	Preston Carr (Sr.)	94	Javon Williams (So.)
DT	93	Rion Roseborough (Jr.)	98	Torin Brazell (So.)
SLB	42	Julien Davis (Jr.)	40	Kendrick DuJour (Sr.)
MLB	**11**	**DJ JOHNSON JR. (JR.)**	47	Cade Law* (Sr.)
WLB	45	Crews Law* (So.)	1	Jackson Barker (Sr.)
CB	14	Ashton Levells-Mitchell* (Sr.)	15	Jaylen Bowden* (Sr.)
CB	31	Derrion Horsley (Fr.)	17	Rae'mon Mosby* (So.)
NB	4	Kevon Merrell (Jr.)	25	Christian Peterson* (Jr.)
S	28	Zyeir Gamble* (Jr.)	13	Ayden Duncanson (Jr.)
S	6	DeMarius Hines (So.)	12	Myles Pollard* (Sr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	95	Andrew Conrad (Sr.)	KR	11	Ray Ray Joseph* (Jr.)
P	48	Tomas O'Halloran (So.)	PR	0	Kyler Pearson (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • 2026 TRANSFER

2025 RESULTS (9-4, 6-2 AMERICAN)

Aug. 28	at NC State	L	17-24
Sept. 6	Campbell	W	56-3
Sept. 13	at Coastal Carolina	W	38-0
Sept. 20	BYU	L	13-34
Sept. 25	Army	W	28-6
Oct. 9	at Tulane	L	19-26
Oct. 16	Tulsa	W	41-27
Nov. 1	at Temple	W	45-14
Nov. 8	Charlotte	W	48-22
Nov. 15	Memphis	W	31-27
Nov. 22	at UTSA	L	24-58
Nov. 29	at Florida Atlantic	W	42-3
Dec. 27	vs. Pitt #	W	23-17

#Military Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	at Alabama
Sept. 12	Appalachian State
Sept. 19	at Old Dominion
Sept. 26	NC Central
Oct. 10	Rice
Oct. 15	at UAB
Oct. 22	at Memphis
Oct. 31	Temple
Nov. 6	South Florida
Nov. 14	at Charlotte
Nov. 21	at Army
Nov. 28	Florida Atlantic

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Terande Spencer, EDGE	★★★
2.	Chad Fairchild, LB	★★★
3.	Dawson Quarterman, WR	★★★
4.	David Coleman Jr., CB	★★★
5.	Ja'Vaughn Hargett, OT	★★★
6.	Ethan Wilson, DL	★★★
7.	Zyon Ratchford, EDGE	★★★
8.	Meliq McGowan, RB	★★★
9.	Christian Harris, OT	★★★
10.	Djimon McLendon, S	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Blake Harrell • Record at School: 14-5 (1+ years)
Career Record: 14-5 (1+ years) • Offensive Coordinator: Jordan Davis
Defensive Coordinators: Jordon Hankins, Roy Tesh • Location: Greenville, N.C.
Stadium: Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium (51,000)

JAMES GUILLORY-IMAGN IMAGES

CADEN VELTKAMP

SCOUTING THE OWLS

"I think [head coach] Zach Kittley will get it going. He runs a style of offense that can find some diamonds in the rough and be really successful with him because he's unique in a very different way from the Armys and Navys of the world. Some of the frustration at a place like that is that there are just so many good teams in the state of Florida. You're just competing with so many other guys to be able to get those types of kids. ... It sounds like the biggest thing with them is that their money just doesn't match up with the rest of the league. Kittley sounds like an awesome dude, and I'm definitely rooting for them. It just seems like it's tough the further into NIL and rev-share that we get."

— An opposing American assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)				
WR	2	Kelby Valsin* (Jr.)	0	Branden Hoch (So.)
WR	**9**	**DOMINIQUE HENRY (SR.)**	6	RJ Garcia II* (Sr.)
WR	**8**	**EASTON MESSER (SR.)**	4	Antojuan Woody* (Jr.)
LT	**57**	**JA'KAVION NONAR (SR.)**	73	Kortez Winslow* (So.)
LG	60	Aqil Meredith-Smith* (So.)	72	Ovie Dubre (Jr.)
C	65	Braden Cunningham (So.)	52	Logan Husband (So.)
RG	**62**	**VINCENT FIACABLE (SR.)**	75	Mauricio Hinds (So.)
RT	74	Ben Galloway* (Jr.)	71	Landon Rapkiewicz (So.)
TE	19	AJ Johnson* (Sr.)	11	Brooks Johnson* (Sr.)
QB	**10**	**CADEN VELTKAMP (SR.)**	18	Drew Devillier* (So.)
RB	28	Kaden Shields-Dutton (Jr.)	22	Brady Tillman III* (Jr.)
DEFENSE (6)				
DE	12	Jay Crable* (Jr.)	**5**	**DESHAUN BATISTE (SR.)**
DT	**1**	**CJ DOGGETTE JR. (SR.)**	94	Corey Clark* (Sr.)
DT	98	Blake Burris* (Sr.)	2	Wilky Denaud (Jr.)
DE	9	Jonathan Bax* (Sr.)	**11**	**GAVENCH MARCELIN (JR.)**
LB	18	Joseph Sipp Jr.* (Sr.)	7	Khmari Johnson (Jr.)
LB	**6**	**LEON HART JR. (JR.)**	43	Hector Chavez (So.)
CB	**4**	**DAMARIUS MCGHEE (SR.)**	26	Amar Reynolds* (So.)
CB	23	JK Johnson* (Sr.)	27	Travis Jackson (Fr.)
NB	3	Derrick Rogers (Jr.)	**8**	**CHRIS TOOLEY III (JR.)**
S	0	Damon Allen (So.)	19	Tyson Rooks* (Sr.)
S	22	Jayden Sweeney (Sr.)	24	Ahlston Ware (Jr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	41	Collin Rogers* (Sr.)	KR	2 Kelby Valsin* (Jr.)
P	91	Reed Chandley* (Jr.)	PR	8 Easton Messer (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

REINHOLD MATAY-IMAGN IMAGES

FLORIDA ATLANTIC OWLS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 96 | AMERICAN PREDICTION: 9 | 2025 RECORD: 4-8, 3-5 AMERICAN

OFFENSE Importing the quarterback-wide receiver tandem of Caden Veltkamp and Easton Messer from WKU bore fruit in head coach Zach Kittley's first season in Boca Raton. FAU flirted with a 30 points per game average and bested North Texas in passing yards per game. But the week-to-week production was inconsistent. Veltkamp threw for a program-record 494 yards in a shootout loss to UConn. One week later, FAU managed just a field goal in a blowout loss to East Carolina. Turnovers were a persistent issue, as Veltkamp paced the FBS in interceptions (17), and the Owls led all teams in giveaways (29).

Familiarity is one thing in FAU's favor — five starters are back on offense, including two on the line. Year 2 in Kittley's offense could yield further fireworks. And perhaps the pivot to Kaden Shields-Dutton in the backfield will produce a more reliable run game to diversify one of the most pass-happy offenses in college football.

DEFENSE For better or for worse, the Owls bring back more than half of their starters from the group that allowed the most points per game (36.3) in program history. FAU was one of 10 teams that gave up more than 200 yards per game both rushing and passing.

Top tackler Leon Hart Jr. and leading sack-getter CJ Doggette Jr. are decorated returnees. Linebacker Joseph Sipp Jr. (Kansas) and defensive tackle Blake Burris (SMU) arrived via the portal to bolster a group that was gashed on the ground. Though the offense put the defense in a bad position with turnovers, the defense was almost as bad at forcing takeaways. FAU's eight turnovers forced were the fifth fewest in the FBS.

The secondary underwent a considerable overhaul, but some of the new blood could help stop the bleeding over the top. Division II All-American and national champion Ahlston Ware transferred from Ferris State to provide some playmaking help at safety.

SPECIALISTS Newcomers at punter and kicker could provide an upgrade at both positions. Reed Chandley comes to FAU from Georgia State, where he led the Sun Belt in punting average (45.8). And placekicker Collin Rogers transferred in from SMU, where he's the all-time leading scorer. Wide receiver Easton Messer will continue returning punts after leading the conference in return average (20.8). Fellow wideout Kelby Valsin could take over kickoff return duties.

FINAL ANALYSIS It will take considerable improvement on defense for FAU to even dream of its first bowl bid since 2020. If that materializes, and Veltkamp cuts down on the turnovers, there's a path to improvement — and maybe even six wins — for the Owls despite a difficult early schedule.

2025 RESULTS (4-8, 3-5 AMERICAN)

Aug. 30	at Maryland	L	7-39
Sept. 6	Florida A&M	W	56-14
Sept. 13	at FIU	L	28-38
Sept. 27	Memphis	L	26-55
Oct. 4	at Rice	W	27-21
Oct. 11	UAB	W	53-33
Oct. 18	at South Florida	L	13-48
Oct. 25	at Navy	L	32-42
Nov. 8	Tulsa	W	40-21
Nov. 15	at Tulane	L	24-35
Nov. 22	UConn	L	45-48
Nov. 29	East Carolina	L	3-42

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	at Florida
Sept. 12	Navy
Sept. 19	FIU
Sept. 26	at ULM
Oct. 3	Texas Southern
Oct. 17	at Army
Oct. 24	Rice
Oct. 29	at North Texas
Nov. 5	UTSA
Nov. 14	at Tulsa
Nov. 21	South Florida
Nov. 28	at East Carolina

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Aedyn Buchanan, OT	★★★★
2.	Travis Jackson, CB	★★★
3.	Nicsaint Joseph Jr., WR	★★★
4.	Sean Williams, CB	★★★
5.	Jeremiah Daoud, QB	★★★
6.	Elijah West, WR	★★★
7.	Antojuan Woody, WR	★★★
8.	Alejandro Schmitt, OT	★★★
9.	Owen Pollock, TE	★★★
10.	Justin Weatherall, WR	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Zach Kittley • Record at School: 4-8 (1 year) • Career Record: 4-8 (1 year) • Offensive Coordinator: Zach Kittley
Defensive Coordinator: Brett Dewhurst • Location: Boca Raton, Fla. • Stadium: Flagler Credit Union Stadium (30,000)

MEMPHIS TIGERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 66 | AMERICAN PREDICTION: 2 | 2025 RECORD: 8-5, 4-4 AMERICAN

OFFENSE New offensive coordinator Kevin Decker will bring a fast, spread-style attack that was successful at Old Dominion, although his quarterbacks are unproven at the FBS level. Marcus Stokes, a finalist for the Div. II Harlon Hill Trophy in 2025 while at West Florida, is expected to land the starting job but will get competition from South Carolina transfer Air Noland, who appeared in only two games for the Gamecocks in 2025.

Transfer running back Jaylin Carter (Southern Miss) followed first-year head coach Charlie Huff from Hattiesburg to Memphis. Carter, Manny Covey (Cincinnati) and Dallan Hayden (Colorado) should get the bulk of the carries. Hayden, a Memphis native, is a powerful back who had 70 carries for 326 yards last season.

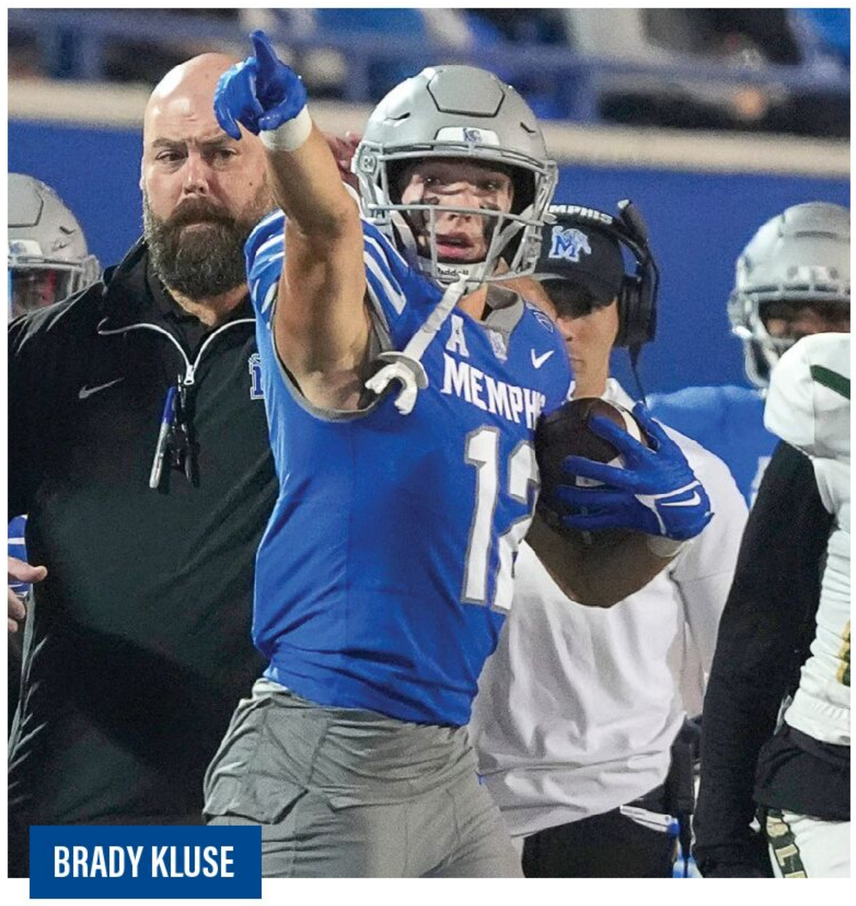
Receivers will line up wider in Decker's scheme. Speedy Alante Brown, a Michigan State transfer granted a seventh year of eligibility, is a big-play candidate, as is Southern Miss transfer Tychaun Chapman.

DEFENSE An abundance of Southern Miss transfers will pace the defense. Linebacker Mike Montgomery and safety Ian Foster, both arriving from Southern Miss, will be the leaders of the unit under the direction of coordinator Lance Guidry, who will implement a 4-2-5 scheme. Guidry spent last season as an analyst at LSU. Foster, expected to play nickel corner in the 4-2-5, is a punishing tackler who can effectively blitz off the edge as well as play smothering man-to-man defense.

J'Mond Tapp, another ex-Southern Miss standout, will anchor the defensive line. Guidry needs to find complements for Montgomery; the rest of the linebackers have amassed only 23 career tackles.

SPECIALISTS Foster, Brown and Covey are experienced return specialists. As a freshman at Marshall in 2024, Foster led the nation in kickoff returns of 50 or more yards (three) and 40 or more yards (five). Brown returned four kicks for a 53.5-yard average in 2025. Covey averaged nearly 10 yards per punt return last season at Cincinnati. Harrison Tuck is a former Australian Rules Football player who spent the past three seasons punting at FCS Alabama State. He averaged 41.8 yards per punt in 2025.

FINAL ANALYSIS There will be many new pieces for the Tigers, including a new head coach and coordinators, new quarterbacks and a roster composed mostly of transfers. It's a challenge for Huff, a Nick Saban disciple with a successful track record. He's brought with him a group of talented players from Southern Miss. If Stokes can quickly adapt to Decker's offense and the speed of FBS defenses, the Tigers' defense should hold its own behind Foster and Montgomery. Huff's goal is to lead the Tigers back to the American Championship Game for the first time since 2019.



BRADY KLUSE

SCOUTING THE TIGERS

"[New Memphis head coach] Charles Huff is a good coach. He's a guy that has done it the hard way, having not been a coordinator, but has just found a way to be successful. ... That's a good mold for him at Memphis. He's gonna have those kids grinding. You see the soundbites about him having no music [at practice] — I like it. He sticks to who he is, and for all we know, they're playing music at practice right now. Who knows? But whatever his ammunition to get guys going is, it works because he's been successful as a head coach, and there's a reason why he's gotten those opportunities. I really think he'll do a good job there."

— An opposing American assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (1)

WR	1	Tychaun Chapman* (Sr.)	8	Bryce Dorsey (So.)
WR	13	Jemyri Davis* (Jr.)	4	Terrell Timmons Jr.* (Sr.)
WR	17	Alante Brown* (Sr.)	12	Brady Kluse (Jr.)
LT	78	Riley McGehee* (Jr.)	71	Xavier Allen* (Sr.)
LG	70	**PARKER MITCHELL (SR.)**	75	Skyler Grant* (Sr.)
C	50	Koby Keenum* (Jr.)	73	Phillip Gray* (Sr.)
RG	65	Maarten Woudsma* (Sr.)	77	Brian Grant* (Sr.)
RT	59	Aaron Karas* (Sr.)	68	Jonathan Young (Sr.)
TE	0	Hunter Tipton* (Sr.)	18	TJ Johnson* (Jr.)
QB	2	Marcus Stokes* (Jr.)	3	Air Noland* (So.)
RB	6	Jaylin Carter* (So.)	28	Manny Covey* (Jr.)

DEFENSE (0)

DE	14	J'Mond Tapp* (Sr.)	93	Jabari Ishmael* (Sr.)
NG	11	Jaden McKinney* (Sr.)	94	J'Mari Monette* (Sr.)
DT	90	Taylor Burton (Sr.)	18	Xavier Miles* (Jr.)
DE	15	Elijah Kinsler* (So.)	4	Joseph Head Jr.* (Jr.)
MLB	23	Jayden Parrish* (So.)	41	Tylon Nash (Sr.)
WLB	9	Mike Montgomery* (Sr.)	43	Wolf Walker (Fr.)
CB	1	Ellis Ellis Jr.* (Sr.)	8	Anthony Richard Jr.* (Sr.)
CB	2	Chauncey Logan Jr. (Sr.)	7	Darius Malcolm Jr.* (So.)
NB	0	Ian Foster* (Jr.)	12	Beni Mwamba (Jr.)*
S	5	Ahmere Foster* (Sr.)	27	Jordan Bell (So.)
S	3	Dylan Smith* (Jr.)	6	Dylan King* (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	80	Philippe Laforge* (So.)	KR	0 Ian Foster* (Jr.)
P	30	Harrison Tuck* (Sr.)	PR	28 Manny Covey* (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** · *2026 TRANSFER

2025 RESULTS (8-5, 4-4 AMERICAN)

Aug. 30	Chattanooga	W	45-10
Sept. 6	at Georgia State	W	38-16
Sept. 13	at Troy	W	28-7
Sept. 20	Arkansas	W	32-31
Sept. 27	at Florida Atlantic	W	55-26
Oct. 4	Tulsa	W	45-7
Oct. 18	at UAB	L	24-31
Oct. 25	South Florida	W	34-31
Oct. 31	at Rice	W	38-14
Nov. 7	Tulane	L	32-38
Nov. 15	at East Carolina	L	27-31
Nov. 27	Navy	L	17-28
Dec. 19	vs. NC State #	L	7-31

#Gasparilla Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Aug. 29	at UNLV
Sept. 5	Arkansas State
Sept. 12	at Boise State
Sept. 19	Tennessee-Martin
Oct. 3	at Charlotte
Oct. 10	UAB
Oct. 16	at Tulane
Oct. 22	East Carolina
Oct. 31	Army
Nov. 12	at South Florida
Nov. 21	at Navy
Nov. 28	Temple

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

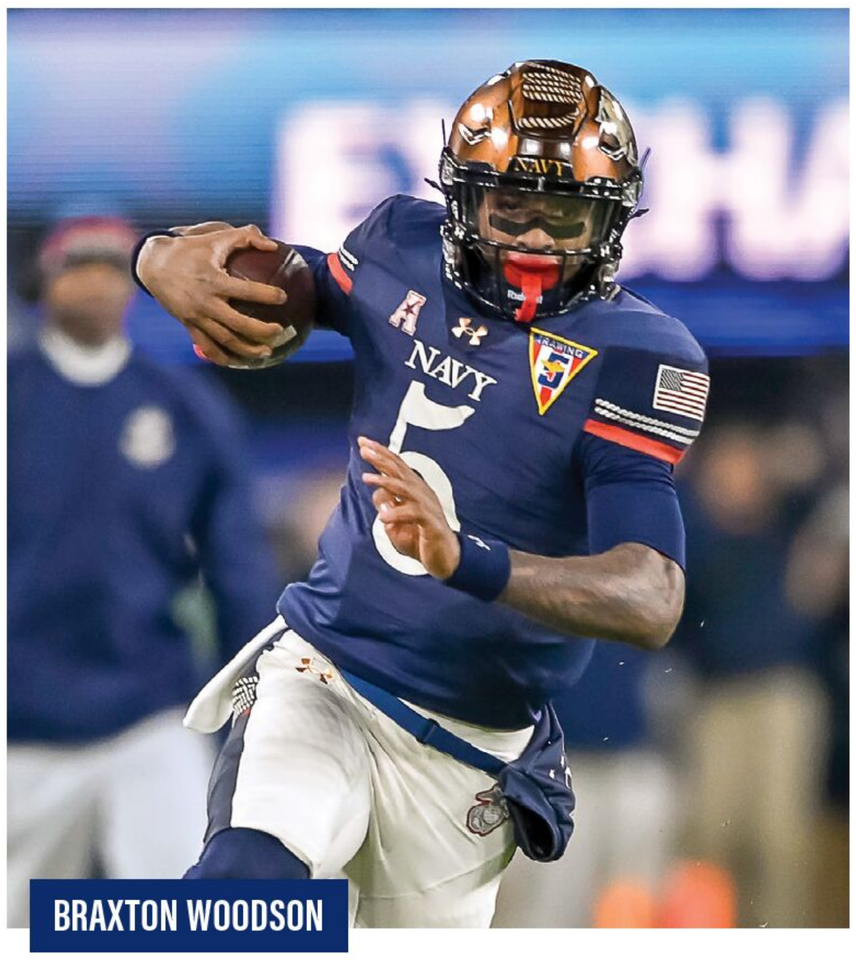
1.	Elijah Fernandez, LB	★★★★
2.	Eric Perry, RB	★★★
3.	Jaylin Taylor, WR	★★★
4.	JT Barlow, S	★★★
5.	Zechariah Jenkins, WR	★★★
6.	Johnny Moody, CB	★★★
7.	Richard Thigpen, OT	★★★
8.	Tim Sims, S	★★★
9.	Jordan Thompson, RB	★★★
10.	Kadan Spratling, LB	★★★

*Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Charles Huff • Record at School: First Season
Career Record: 39-25 (5 seasons) • Offensive Coordinators: Kevin Decker, David Weeks • Defensive Coordinator: Lance Guidry • Location: Memphis, Tenn. • Stadium: Simmons Bank Liberty Stadium (50,000)

CHRIS DAY/THE COMMERCIAL APPEAL



BRAXTON WOODSON

NAVY MIDSHIPMEN

NATIONAL FORECAST: 60 | AMERICAN PREDICTION: 1 | 2025 RECORD: 11-2, 7-1 AMERICAN

OFFENSE Navy bid farewell to its big three of quarterback Blake Horvath, running back Alex Tecza and slotback Eli Heidenreich, who accounted for 68% of the yards from scrimmage last season. Braxton Woodson takes over at quarterback after displaying dynamic running ability. The 6-foot-3 senior possesses sprinter's speed and has broken numerous long runs while seeing time at quarterback, slotback and wide receiver.

Senior running back Vic Listorti missed most of last season with a lingering hamstring injury and remains a question mark. Junior slotback Charles Robinson emerged as a playmaker during spring practice, earning the Admiral Mack Award as Navy's most improved player. Senior wide receiver Luke Hutchison, who missed seven games with a shoulder injury last season, is the team's fastest offensive player and could become a downfield threat. In the third season of his hybrid Wing-T offense, coordinator Drew Cronic says it's time for the split ends and tight ends to become impact performers in the passing game.

Senior guard Hoke Smith II is one of four returning starters along an offensive line that paved the way for Navy to lead the nation in rushing offense (285.6 yards per game).

DEFENSE The Midshipmen must replace some losses up front, including first-team All-America nose guard Landon Robinson, making the pass rush a genuine concern.

Navy does return two highly productive inside linebackers in MarcAnthony Parker and Coleman Cauley, who combined for 176 tackles last season. Safety Giuseppe Sessi was second on the squad with 81 tackles and called the defensive signals.

Pass defense was a problem for most of last season but improved dramatically down the stretch after Phillip Hamilton moved to safety. Starting corners Nick Bell and Irabonoise Oniha bring experience.

SPECIALISTS Punter Jacob Carlson averaged 44.5 yards in his first season as the starter. While Justin Welch will enter August training camp atop the depth chart at placekicker, the position battle figures to continue right up to the opener. Slotback Isaiah Bryant has been a productive kickoff returner and may now be asked to handle punts as well.

FINAL ANALYSIS The Middies are relying on several unproven players to fill important roles, especially on offense. But Navy takes great pride in being a developmental program, and it has become commonplace for previously unknown players to emerge. Fourth-year head coach Brian Newberry is confident that he has built a program that can reload.

SCOUTING THE MIDSHIPMEN

"They're not dealing with the NIL and transfer portal world quite as much as everybody else is. I think that there are pros and cons to that. [Navy] certainly leans in on the pros. They know who they are and who is going to be back for them. Offensively, they're obviously really hard to prep for. ... Even looking at them from a defensive perspective, they're pretty multiple with what they do, given the type of retention that they can have and with the type of student that can attend such a prestigious institution. That's the prep difficulty and why they've been so good. I think that they should be really good again."

— An opposing American assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)				
WR	89	Luke Hutchison (Sr.)	86	Josh Guerin (Sr.)
LT	**73**	**SEAN CROWLEY (JR.)**	65	Connor Heater (Jr.)
LG	70	Jake Polito (Jr.)	66	Will Hampton (So.)
C	**69**	**CAM NICHOLS (SR.)**	63	Toran Smith (Jr.)
RG	**79**	**HOKE SMITH II (SR.)**	52	Matt Tomaszewski (So.)
RT	**77**	**MALCOLM JOHNSON (SO.)**	60	Zarian Simms (Sr.)
TE	85	Jake Norris (Sr.)	36	Jordan Collins (So.)
QB	5	Braxton Woodson (Sr.)	8	Jackson Gutierrez (Jr.)
SB	23	Charles Robinson (Jr.)	2	Robert Jones III (Jr.)
SB	25	Isaiah Bryant (Sr.)	26	Michael Barrow (Jr.)
RB	40	Vic Listorti (Sr.)	35	Quinton Ezzard (Jr.)
DEFENSE (5)				
DE	65	Aiden Lyczek (Jr.)	70	Ikenna Ozurumba (Sr.)
NG	94	Xavyer Arrington (Jr.)	99	Chris Herock (Jr.)
DT	**95**	**GRIFFEN WILLIS (SR.)**	97	Matt Reyes (Sr.)
OLB	18	Will Miller (So.)	14	Trent Gillis (So.)
ILB	**58**	**COLEMAN CAULEY (SR.)**	53	Marcus Bleazard (Sr.)
ILB	**56**	**MARCANTHONY PARKER (JR.)**	52	Nolan McCamy (Sr.)
OLB	45	Christian Johnson (So.)	39	Job Grant (Sr.)
CB	10	Nick Bell (Jr.)	28	Bryce Allen (Sr.)
CB	3	Irabonoise Oniha (Sr.)	13	Cam Robinson (So.)
SS	**16**	**GIUSEPPE SESSI (SR.)**	5	Matthew Seliga (Sr.)
FS	**6**	**PHILLIP HAMILTON (JR.)**	8	Aaron Rose (Jr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	95	Justin Welch (So.)	KR	25 Isaiah Bryant (Sr.)
P	15	Jacob Carlson (Jr.)	PR	23 Charles Robinson (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

TOMMY GILLIGAN-IMAGN IMAGES

2025 RESULTS (11-2, 7-1 AMERICAN)

Aug. 30	VMI	W	52-7
Sept. 6	UAB	W	38-24
Sept. 13	at Tulsa	W	42-23
Sept. 27	Rice	W	21-13
Oct. 4	Air Force	W	34-31
Oct. 11	at Temple	W	32-31
Oct. 25	Florida Atlantic	W	42-32
Nov. 1	at North Texas	L	17-31
Nov. 8	at Notre Dame	L	10-49
Nov. 15	South Florida	W	41-38
Nov. 27	at Memphis	W	28-17
Dec. 13	vs. Army #	W	17-16
Jan. 2	vs. Cincinnati %	W	35-13

#Baltimore %Liberty Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	Towson
Sept. 12	at Florida Atlantic
Sept. 25	at UAB
Oct. 3	at Air Force
Oct. 10	Tulsa
Oct. 17	at UTSA
Oct. 24	North Texas
Oct. 31	vs. Notre Dame #
Nov. 7	Temple
Nov. 21	Memphis
Nov. 28	at Charlotte
Dec. 12	vs. Army %

#Foxborough, MA
%East Rutherford, NJ

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Alexander Brewer, IOL	★★★
2.	Kaden Olson, S	★★★
3.	Kaden Glover, TE	★★★
4.	Adrian Symalla, RB	★★★
5.	Ian Campbell, EDGE	★★★
6.	Clinton Lee, WR	★★★
7.	Deuce Jefferson, QB	★★★
8.	Darren Jackson, LB	★★★
9.	Peter Bonnet, OT	★★★
10.	Dakarion Jamison, S	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Brian Newberry • Record at School: 26-12 (3 years) • Career Record: 26-12 (3 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Drew Cronic
Defensive Coordinators: Eric Lewis, Ricky Brown • Location: Annapolis, Md. • Stadium: Navy-Marine Corps Memorial Stadium (34,000)

NORTH TEXAS MEAN GREEN

NATIONAL FORECAST: 109 | AMERICAN PREDICTION: 11 | 2025 RECORD: 12-2, 7-1 AMERICAN

OFFENSE North Texas boasted one of the top offenses in college football a year ago, averaging an FBS-leading 512.4 yards and 45.1 points per game en route to a 12-win season and American Conference Championship Game appearance. Head coach Eric Morris, the mastermind behind it all, is now at Oklahoma State. So are quarterback Drew Mestemaker, wide receiver Wyatt Young and running back Caleb Hawkins.

Former Troy and West Virginia head coach Neal Brown takes over the program after serving on the Texas staff last season and inherits an offense with no returning starters.

Quarterback Chris Jimerson Jr. appeared in four games as a true freshman. Transfers will be critically important at the skill positions. Wide receiver TJ Chukwurah was a Division II All-American at Black Hills State, and ex-West Virginia running back Jahiem White was a Freshman All-American under Brown for the Mountaineers in 2023.

Much of the offensive line that paved the way for the most rushing TDs in the country is gone, but Georgia Southern transfer Chandler Strong has 30 career starts and will fill one vacancy.

DEFENSE UNT struggled at times on defense, allowing 381.9 yards and 26.5 points per game. The Mean Green ranked 130th nationally in run defense, giving up 215.7 rushing yards per game. Conversely, pass defense was a strong point, limiting teams to just 166.2 yards (eighth in the FBS). First-year defensive coordinator Matt Powledge, who held that position at Baylor the past three years, will have his work cut out for him.

Terrell Washington has the most experience among returning defensive linemen. The additions of transfers Aaron Alexander (Arkansas State) and Zakye Baker (SMU) should bolster the linebacking corps.

Twin defensive backs Caden and Cameren Jenkins both followed Powledge from Baylor to Denton and should fill starting roles.

SPECIALISTS Placekicker Kali Nguma made 92.3% of his field-goal attempts last season before transferring to Colorado State. Former Appalachian State kicker Dominic De Freitas (20-of-25 FGs, 33-of-33 PATs) will replace him. The Mean Green ranked fifth in kick returns and 14th in punt returns in the American last season but must find replacements after losing Simeon Evans and Miles Coleman.

FINAL ANALYSIS Running the ball has been a staple of Brown-coached offenses, so expect the Mean Green to lean heavily on the run game. Several new faces on defense bring a lot of questions with them, too, but change could be good after the unit's inconsistent showing the past two years.

2025 RESULTS (12-2, 7-1 AMERICAN)

Aug. 30	Lamar	W	51-0
Sept. 6	at W. Michigan (ot)	W	33-30
Sept. 13	Washington State	W	59-10
Sept. 20	at Army (ot)	W	45-38
Sept. 27	South Alabama	W	36-22
Oct. 10	South Florida	L	36-63
Oct. 18	UTSA	W	55-17
Oct. 24	at Charlotte	W	54-20
Nov. 1	Navy	W	31-17
Nov. 15	at UAB	W	53-24
Nov. 22	at Rice	W	56-24
Nov. 28	Temple	W	52-25
Dec. 5	at Tulane #	L	21-34
Dec. 27	vs. San Diego State %	W	49-47

#AAC Championship %New Mexico Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	at Indiana
Sept. 12	UNLV
Sept. 19	at Texas State
Sept. 26	Houston Christian
Oct. 1	at Tulsa
Oct. 10	Charlotte
Oct. 24	at Navy
Oct. 29	Florida Atlantic
Nov. 7	Rice
Nov. 14	at UTSA
Nov. 21	at Tulane
Nov. 28	UAB

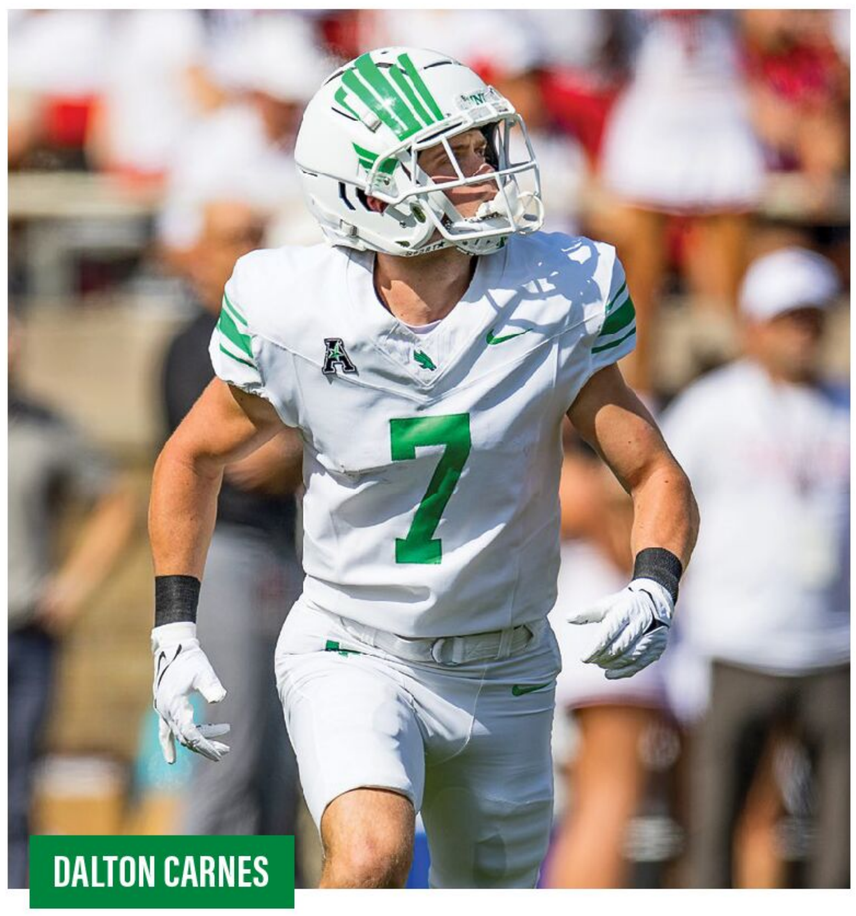
TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Caden Voltaire, OT	★★★
2.	Lathon Latiolais, WR	★★★
3.	Cason Applewhite, EDGE	★★★
4.	Jerious Singletary, EDGE	★★★
5.	KC Ekwu, OT	★★★
6.	Adarion Nettles, RB	★★★
7.	Grady Holmes, DL	★★★
8.	Courage Osawe Jr., DL	★★★
9.	Tyson Wilson, S	★★★
10.	Ziondre Williams, QB	★★★

*Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Neal Brown • Record at School: First Season
Career Record: 72-51 (10 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Neal Brown
Defensive Coordinators: Matt Powledge, Bradley Dale Peveto
Location: Denton, Texas • Stadium: DATCU Stadium (30,100)



DALTON CARNES

SCOUTING THE MEAN GREEN

"You see the similarities in the coaching trees and what they believe philosophically will be pretty similar. I think you should see that thing continue to go. It'll be interesting to see what they do at quarterback, but it should be more of the same under [new head coach] Neal Brown. It should have the same feel when you watch them as what Eric Morris did. ... We've been getting stuck recruiting against them a lot lately. Obviously, I know that it's going to be really tough to sustain what they did last year. But with all the talent that they have to recruit in that area, I would think that they'll be able to stay in that 8-10-win conversation every year."

— An opposing American assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (0)

WR	3	TJ Chukwurah* (Sr.)	8	Shandon King (Jr.)
WR	16	James Tyre* (Jr.)	19	Grayson O'Bara (Sr.)
WR	11	Dalton Carnes (Sr.)	80	Baron Tipton (So.)
LT	79	Jordan Reasonover (Fr.)		KC Ekwu (Fr.)
LG	72	Neto Umeozulu* (Sr.)	53	Dylan Shaw (So.)
C	57	Chandler Strong* (Sr.)	61	Drew Cunningham* (So.)
RG	54	Henry Fenuku* (Fr.)	68	Keon Johnson (Jr.)
RT	71	Johnny Williams IV* (Jr.)	70	Brody Hamilton (Fr.)
TE	7	Max Reese* (Sr.)	88	Victor Aderungboye (So.)
QB	12	Chris Jimerson Jr. (Fr.)	16	Tom von Grote (Fr.)
RB	1	Jahiem White* (Jr.)	5	Jayden Becks (Jr.)

DEFENSE (0)

DE	91	Davion Rhodes* (Sr.)	6	Udoka Ezeani* (Sr.)
NT	95	Rudy Vargas Jr. (Sr.)	99	Avion Carter (Jr.)
DT	93	Terrell Washington (Jr.)	15	Justin Benton* (Jr.)
DE	10	David Onuoha* (Sr.)	97	Demetrie Morgan (Sr.)
LB	3	Zakye Barker* (Sr.)	17	Cedric Roberts* (Jr.)
LB	7	Aaron Alexander* (Sr.)	26	S'Maje Burrell (Jr.)
LB	30	Chantz Johnson* (Jr.)	34	Brenden Reese (So.)
CB	4	CJ Coombes* (Jr.)	16	BJ Allen Jr. (Sr.)
CB	8	Caden Jenkins* (Sr.)	1	Keshawn Davila* (Sr.)
S	9	Cameren Jenkins* (Jr.)	22	Julian Knox (So.)
S	21	Jason Cross Jr.* (So.)	29	Kamdon McFarland (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	90	Dominic De Freitas* (So.)	KR	16	James Tyre* (Jr.)
P	37	Will Hutchison (Jr.)	PR	16	James Tyre* (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

JOHN E. MOORE III/GETTY IMAGES

QUINTON JACKSON

SCOUTING THE OWLS

"Schematically, they do good stuff on offense that challenges people just because it's so hard to see with that triple option. What's interesting about this league is there are three teams who are like that, but it's hard to prepare for, and that'll start to give people fits. ... [Head coach] Scott Abell is gonna do a great job. That's how you've gotta play over there with a specific brand of football to be able to attack a specific type of player. ... When you have the ball against them, it feels like all the pressure is on you because if you don't score or pick up a couple first downs, you aren't getting the ball back for five, six, seven minutes. Yeah, Abell is gonna do a really good job."

— An opposing American assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)

WR	81	Braylen Walker (Sr.)	88	Keenan Arcega-Whiteside (Fr.)
WR	0	Payton Matthews (So.)	7	Barry Jackson Jr.* (Jr.)
WR	19	Jordan Clark (Fr.)	6	Ben Grice* (So.)
LT	58	Peyton Farmer (Jr.)	67	Luke Needham (Jr.)
LG	**50**	**PATRICK VALENT (JR.)**	78	Erben Birkhoff (Fr.)
C	56	Nate Bledsoe (Jr.)	62	Cullen Witt (So.)
RG	71	Cole Principe (So.)	77	Ian Bothwell (Fr.)
RT	73	Justin Michaelis (Sr.)	**53**	**LUKE MILLER (SO.)**
TE	86	James Falk (Jr.)	91	DD Oliver (Fr.)
QB	11	Jacurri Brown* (Sr.)	4	Gael Ochoa* (So.)
RB	**10**	**QUINTON JACKSON (SR.)**	28	D'Andre Hardeman Jr. (So.)

DEFENSE (2)

DE	**8**	**JOSEPH MUTOMBO (JR.)**	94	Braden Bays (Fr.)
DT	57	Aquantis Clemmons (Jr.)	15	Matthew Aribisala (Sr.)
DT	**96**	**DILLAN BOTTS (SR.)**	11	Christopher Clark-Jolivet (Jr.)
RUSH	16	Chibby Nwajuaku (Sr.)	42	DeReyon Jenkins (Fr.)
LB	14	Beau Barton (Jr.)	34	Kaleb Blanton (So.)
LB	44	Cooper King (Jr.)	99	Jesus Machado Jr.* (Sr.)
VIPER	2	Jo Chavez (Jr.)	7	AJ Brown* (Sr.)
CB	4	Tariq Watson* (Sr.)	10	Kyren Condoll* (So.)
CB	5	Jerrick Harper (Sr.)	12	Jamir Benjamin* (So.)
S	18	Ahran Ogbor (So.)	20	Bailey Fletcher (So.)
S	0	Daveon Hook (Sr.)	23	Michael Amey III (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	28	Enock Gota (Sr.)	KR	10 Quinton Jackson (Sr.)
P	29	Charlie Durkin* (Sr.)	PR	10 Quinton Jackson (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

ROY TAORMINA-IMAGN IMAGES

RICE OWLS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 120 | AMERICAN PREDICTION: 12 | 2025 RECORD: 5-8, 2-6 AMERICAN

OFFENSE The Owls became run-heavy and predictable at times last season. Head coach Scott Abell, who is entering his second season at the helm after a 5-8 debut, implemented his own version of the option offense last season, and the Owls had success running it, but there will be a new quarterback under center for a second straight season. After Chase Jenkins left via the transfer portal, Abell brought in transfers Jacurri Brown, who had stops at Miami (Fla.) and UCF, and Gael Ochoa (UNLV) to run the offense.

Whoever is under center will be tasked with improving a unit that averaged 19.1 points per game last season and had most of its success on the ground, averaging nearly 205 rushing yards per game. Leading rusher Quentin Jackson returns, but the Owls lost most of their skill position players to graduation or the portal.

DEFENSE The Owls' defense lost most of its starters and the top seven tacklers to graduation and the transfer portal, so it might take a few games for Rice to find its groove on that side of the ball.

Viper Jo Chavez and defensive end Joseph Mutombo will be among the returning players who will lead a unit that surrendered nearly 33 points and 404 yards per contest. The Owls need more takeaways after forcing only seven last season, and they also must do a better job of stopping teams in the red zone after opposing offenses scored on all 41 red-zone trips last season, including 30 touchdowns.

SPECIALISTS Enock Gota returns as the primary placekicker. Gota was 10-of-13 on field goals last season, but he has yet to hit from beyond 50 yards. Gota is solid on kickoffs with 37 touchbacks each of the past two seasons. Punter Charlie Durkin comes to Rice after a good season with Kent State, where he averaged 41.4 yards per punt, including six over 50 yards, and placed 14 inside the 20-yard line.

FINAL ANALYSIS The Owls were improved in Abell's first season, appearing in a bowl game despite their losing record thanks to having the highest Academic Progress Rate among five-win teams. Rice will have a chance to compete for a bowl game again this season, but the Owls were forced to retool through the portal after losing more than 50 players to graduation and transfers.

The Owls have to find a way to score after surpassing the 20-point mark in only five games last season and in only two of their eight losses. The defense was on the field too much due to the inability of the offense to sustain drives, so the success of the Owls this season could come down simply to moving the sticks.

2025 RESULTS (5-8, 2-6 AMERICAN)

Aug. 30	at Louisiana	W	14-12
Sept. 6	Houston	L	9-35
Sept. 13	Prairie View	W	38-17
Sept. 18	at Charlotte	W	28-17
Sept. 27	at Navy	L	13-21
Oct. 4	Florida Atlantic	L	21-27
Oct. 11	at UTSA	L	13-61
Oct. 25	UConn (ot)	W	37-34
Oct. 31	Memphis	L	14-38
Nov. 8	UAB	W	24-17
Nov. 22	North Texas	L	24-56
Nov. 29	at South Florida	L	3-52
Jan. 2	vs. Texas State #	L	10-41

#Armed Forces Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	Houston Christian
Sept. 12	at Notre Dame
Sept. 19	Western Michigan
Sept. 26	at Fresno State
Oct. 3	UTSA
Oct. 10	at East Carolina
Oct. 17	Tulsa
Oct. 24	at Florida Atlantic
Nov. 7	at North Texas
Nov. 14	Tulane
Nov. 19	at Temple
Nov. 28	Army

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Ayden Wilhelm, QB	★★★
2.	Marcus Page Jr., OT	★★★
3.	Chris Knauls, DL	★★★
4.	Seth Clarke, EDGE	★★★
5.	Jayden Cupitt, LB	★★★
6.	Justin Powell, RB	★★★
7.	Brock Reddic, DL	★★★
8.	Leyonte Chandler, OT	★★★
9.	Sawyer Rice, ATH	★★★
10.	Fisher Leftwich, WR	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Scott Abell • Record at School: 5-8 (1 year) • Career Record: 91-60 (14 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Vince Munch • Defensive Coordinator: Jon Kay • Location: Houston, Texas • Stadium: Rice Stadium (47,000)

SOUTH FLORIDA BULLS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 76 | AMERICAN PREDICTION: 6 | 2025 RECORD: 9-4, 6-2 AMERICAN

OFFENSE First-time head coach Brian Hartline, the former Ohio State offensive coordinator, is best known for producing NFL-level receivers. He has acquired a quartet of wideouts from Power 4 programs, including Tampa Bay Area prep product Bryson Rodgers, who played for him with the Buckeyes. Holdover receiver Mudia Reuben and tight end Wyatt Sullivan will be active as well.

Who will throw the passes? Former 4-star quarterback prospect Michael Van Buren Jr., who started four games for LSU in 2025, figures to be the favorite over Luke Kromenhoek (Mississippi State) and KJ Cooper (Texas Southern). The Bulls will likely rely upon D.J. Crowther (929 yards, 10 touchdowns last season at FCS Dartmouth) and Jason Collins Jr. (1,009 yards in 18 career games at FCS Morgan State) at running back.

USF is projected to have the largest offensive line in school history — with an average size of 6-foot-5, 315 pounds.

DEFENSE The new defensive coordinator is Josh Aldridge, whose East Carolina unit led the American Conference in seven categories last season, including total defense (348.8 yards per game) and scoring defense (20.3 points per game). Aldridge's defenders have consistent credos: playing fast, making full-speed decisions and creating havoc.

Up front, look for havoc-creating play from a pair of transfers — C.J. Hicks (Ohio State) and Shamar Meikle (Oregon State), who both play the hybrid "Jack" position. At nose tackle, 330-pound Major Dillard (FCS Norfolk State) will demand attention.

There's playmaking potential with outside linebacker Grayson "Pup" Howard (Florida), a former starter who suffered through an injury-plagued 2025 season, cornerback Za'Quan Bryan (Minnesota) and safety Israel Boyce (West Virginia). Holdover safety Tavin Ward, entering his fourth season as a starter, will provide leadership and stability.

SPECIALISTS Placekicker Nico Gramatica was 18-for-24 last season on field-goal attempts, including a 52-yarder (he has five career makes from 50 yards and beyond). Luke Goater (36.2-yard average) will punt, marking the ninth consecutive season the Bulls have used an Australian import.

FINAL ANALYSIS There are new faces galore in the 30th season for USF football — and its final season in Raymond James Stadium. The Bulls will open a $348.5 million, 35,000-seat on-campus stadium in 2027.

The Bulls get two expected American contenders (Memphis and Tulane) at home while avoiding Navy and North Texas altogether. So Hartline's Bulls could contend for the program's first conference title.

2025 RESULTS (9-4, 6-2 AMERICAN)

Aug. 28	Boise State	W	34-7
Sept. 6	at Florida	W	18-16
Sept. 13	at Miami (Fla.)	L	12-49
Sept. 20	South Carolina State	W	63-14
Oct. 3	Charlotte	W	54-26
Oct. 10	at North Texas	W	63-36
Oct. 18	Florida Atlantic	W	48-13
Oct. 25	at Memphis	L	31-34
Nov. 6	UTSA	W	55-23
Nov. 15	at Navy	L	38-41
Nov. 22	at UAB	W	48-18
Nov. 29	Rice	W	52-3
Dec. 17	vs. Old Dominion #	L	10-24

#Cure Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	FIU
Sept. 12	at Army
Sept. 19	Delaware State
Sept. 26	at Bowling Green
Oct. 3	Temple
Oct. 8	at UTSA
Oct. 17	Kent State
Oct. 31	UAB
Nov. 6	at East Carolina
Nov. 12	Memphis
Nov. 21	at Florida Atlantic
Nov. 27	Tulane

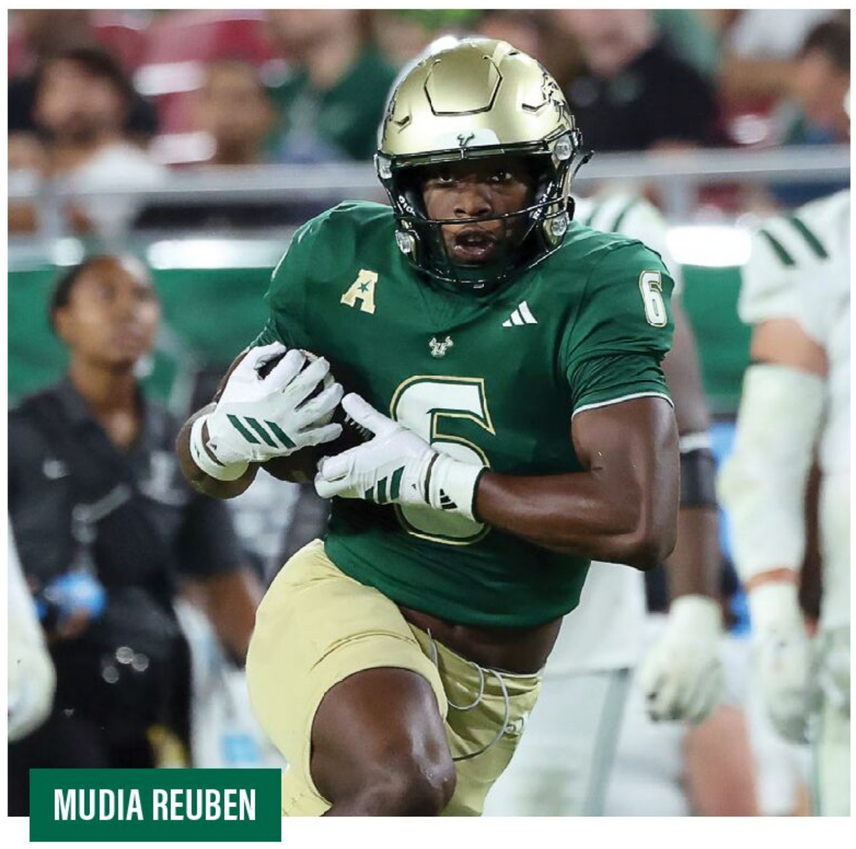
TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Dennis King III, LB	★★★
2.	Iverson Garcia-Ponce, DL	★★★
3.	Jayson Franklin, RB	★★★
4.	Demetrius Geathers Jr., EDGE	★★★
5.	Ja'Kyri Watson, CB	★★★
6.	Masiyah Limehouse, CB	★★★
7.	Dmari Roberts, WR	★★★
8.	Lorenzo Barnes, LB	★★★
9.	Jordan Harrison, IOL	★★★
10.	Derrick Nichols, CB	★★★

*Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Brian Hartline • Record at School: First Season • Career Record: First Season • Offensive Coordinator: Tim Beck
Defensive Coordinator: Josh Aldridge • Location: Tampa, Fla. • Stadium: Raymond James Stadium (69,218)



MUDIA REUBEN

SCOUTING THE BULLS

"With the resources that they have access to and the region of the country that they're in, you know that it's always going to be one of the most talented teams in the league. Bringing in a background like [new head coach] Brian Hartline made sense to me. ... [Hartline] is really respected. Recruiting will be at an all-time high there because of the job that he did at Ohio State. What I wonder about is whether all those same great things that allowed him to become a head coach, will those things translate to now being a great head coach? I know that they're close to spending like a Power 4 program, but they're not Auburn, or else [previous USF head coach] Alex Golesh might still be there. But they're not lacking for resources for sure."

— An opposing American assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (2)

WR	1	Bryson Rodgers* (Jr.)	4	Arhmad Branch* (Jr.)
WR	**6**	**MUDIA REUBEN (SR.)**	9	Armani Winfield* (Sr.)
WR	0	Cameron Seldon* (Sr.)	7	Jaron Glover* (Sr.)
LT	77	Michael Wooten* (Sr.)	71	Kahari Finley* (Sr.)
LG	**67**	**THOMAS SHRADER (SR.)**	60	Khalil Collins (Fr.)
C	72	Cash Hudson* (Sr.)	55	James Jenkins (Jr.)
RG	78	Caleb Cook* (Sr.)	61	Julius Tate* (So.)
RT	79	Ethan Green* (Sr.)	58	TJ Lawrence (So.)
TE	8	Wyatt Sullivan (Sr.)	85	Kade Caton* (So.)
QB	3	Michael Van Buren Jr.* (Jr.)	17	Luke Kromenhoek* (So.)
RB	5	D.J. Crowther* (Sr.)	2	Jason Collins Jr.* (Jr.)

DEFENSE (1)

DE	4	Michael Williams II (Sr.)	90	Terrell Jones* (Sr.)
NT	77	Major Dillard* (Sr.)	99	Jahari Grant (Jr.)
DT	11	Asani Redwood* (Sr.)	28	Ryan Jenkins (Jr.)
JACK	1	C.J. Hicks* (Sr.)	10	Shamar Meikle* (Jr.)
MLB	7	Sam Robinson* (So.)	55	Greg Otten (Jr.)
OLB	0	Grayson Howard* (Jr.)	25	Zavier Hamilton (So.)
CB	3	Za'Quan Bryan* (Jr.)	8	Amarion Fortenberry* (Jr.)
CB	16	Teddy Foster* (Jr.)	29	Deylen Platt (So.)
STAR	5	Ayden Jackson* (Sr.)	15	Tayvion Beasley* (Sr.)
S	9	Israel Boyce* (Jr.)	13	Malcolm Ziglar* (Jr.)
S	**2**	**TAVIN WARD (SR.)**	20	A'mon Lane-Ganus* (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	7	Nico Gramatica (Jr.)	KR	15	Alvon Isaac (So.)
P	39	Luke Goater (Fr.)	PR	80	Joshua Porter (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

KIM KLEMENT NEITZEL-IMAGN IMAGES

PETER CLARKE

TERENCE LEWIS/ICON SPORTSWIRE VIA GETTY IMAGES

SCOUTING THE OWLS

"[Head coach] K.C. Keeler is a winner. He's done things the right way. I know a lot of people may not agree with some of the things he's done, but he wins. Ultimately, that's what it's about. Getting [12 power-conference transfers] in, especially at a place like Temple, that says a lot because there are schools in the conference that kids are more likely to go to. But [Keeler] is in his home area, and he's been able to put his fingerprints on it. He's gonna have success. ... I wasn't sure how they were going to handle [revenue sharing] at a place like Temple because they're also tenants at Lincoln Financial Field. Obviously, they made a decision to do it, but I don't know how they're getting that because they didn't use to have that kind of money."

— An opposing American assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (7)

WR	10	Jayce Freeman* (Sr.)	85	Rameir Hardy (So.)
WR	1	**COLIN CHASE (SR.)**	12	Demonte Greene* (Jr.)
WR	17	**JOJO BERMUDEZ (SR.)**	86	Reis Stocksdale* (Sr.)
LT	71	**GIAKOBY HILLS (SO.)**	55	Kevin Terry (Jr.)
LG	52	**ERIC KING (JR.)**	51	Mausa Palu (Sr.)
C	57	**GRAYSON MAINS (SR.)**	76	John Stone* (Jr.)
RG	54	**JACKSON PRUITT (SR.)**	74	Davray Venu (So.)
RT	75	Luke Watson (Jr.)	70	Zach Aamland* (Jr.)
TE	88	**PETER CLARKE (SR.)**	33	Ryder Kusch (So.)
QB	14	Jaxon Smolik* (So.)	13	Ajani Sheppard* (Jr.)
RB	27	Sam Brown V* (Jr.)	26	Keveun Mason (So.)

DEFENSE (2)

DE	99	Cameron Jones (So.)	97	Davier Bishop* (Jr.)
DT	98	Joseph Auzenne (Sr.)	58	Kaleb Artis* (Jr.)
DT	93	Kevin Hornbeak* (Sr.)	52	Russell Sykes IV (So.)
EDGE	10	Jaylon Joseph* (Sr.)	56	JaMair Diaz* (Jr.)
LB	22	Eric Stuart (Sr.)	30	Jayvant Brown (Jr.)
LB	33	**CURLY ORDONEZ (SR.)**	44	Tyree Alualu (Jr.)
CB	13	Denzel Chavis (So.)	14	Nakeel Lawrence* (Jr.)
CB	27	Devontae Ward-Grant (Fr.)	32	Adrian Laing (So.)
S	18	Kolin Dinkins* (Sr.)	23	Zyil Powell (Jr.)
S	24	Saboor Karriem* (Sr.)	17	Jaeden Gould* (Sr.)
S	29	**AVERY POWELL (SR.)**	16	Pooh Lawton (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	98	Carl Hardin (Jr.)	KR	29 Hunter Smith (Sr.)
P	7	Dante Atton (Sr.)	PR	17 JoJo Bermudez (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

TEMPLE OWLS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 90 | AMERICAN PREDICTION: 8 | 2025 RECORD: 5-7, 3-5 AMERICAN

OFFENSE Temple's offense enters the 2026 season with cautious optimism after showing clear signs of progress a year ago under offensive coordinator Tyler Walker. The biggest question for the Owls will be under center, as they look to replace quarterback Evan Simon. As it stands, the quarterback battle is a two-horse race between Penn State transfer Jaxon Smolik and Washington State transfer Ajani Sheppard, with Smolik appearing to have the edge coming out of spring ball.

Temple returns several key weapons in the passing game, headlined by standout tight end Peter Clarke and veteran receivers Colin Chase and JoJo Bermudez. The ground game will feature a new primary option in Sam Brown V, a Rutgers transfer who impressed throughout the spring as a physical, downhill runner. Perhaps most importantly, the Owls bring back four starters along the offensive line, providing valuable continuity.

DEFENSE The Owls look to pair returning leadership with an influx of new contributors. The strength of the unit lies at linebacker, where Curly Ordonez and Eric Stuart lead a group that brings both production and experience. Ordonez, an All-American Conference honorable mention pick in 2025, is working back from offseason surgery, but once healthy, he and Stuart should provide a steady presence in the middle.

Up front, the Owls will rely on a plethora of new faces. Though unproven, the group has a chance to earn roles early and improve on last season's struggles, when Temple ranked among the nation's worst in rushing defense (197.3 yards per game) and totaled just 16 sacks. Greater consistency and physicality will be key.

Cornerback remains the biggest question mark due to limited experience and depth, while safety stands out as arguably the deepest position group. Illinois transfer Saboor Karriem impressed during the spring with his toughness and athleticism and looks ready to make an immediate impact.

SPECIALISTS Senior punter Dante Atton returns to anchor the unit, while Carl Hardin is set for his second season as the placekicker after converting 11-of-14 field goals and all 40 PATs last year. In the return game, Bermudez flashed elite potential on punt returns a season ago. Kickoff return duties are more of an open competition, but veteran running back Hunter Smith is a strong candidate thanks to his explosiveness in space.

FINAL ANALYSIS Year 2 of the K.C. Keeler era brings a mix of optimism and unfinished business. Despite a disappointing finish that saw the Owls drop their final four games and miss bowl eligibility at 5–7, Temple still exceeded many expectations in 2025. There is real optimism surrounding the program as Temple aims to claim its first winning season since 2019.

2025 RESULTS (5-7, 3-5 AMERICAN)

Aug. 30	at UMass	W	42-10
Sept. 6	Howard	W	55-7
Sept. 13	Oklahoma	L	3-42
Sept. 20	at Georgia Tech	L	24-45
Oct. 4	UTSA	W	27-21
Oct. 11	Navy	L	31-32
Oct. 18	at Charlotte	W	49-14
Oct. 25	at Tulsa (ot)	W	38-37
Nov. 1	East Carolina	L	14-45
Nov. 8	at Army	L	13-14
Nov. 22	Tulane	L	13-37
Nov. 28	at North Texas	L	25-52

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	Rhode Island
Sept. 12	Penn State
Sept. 19	at Toledo
Sept. 26	Army
Oct. 3	at South Florida
Oct. 10	UConn
Oct. 17	Charlotte
Oct. 31	at East Carolina
Nov. 7	at Navy
Nov. 14	UAB
Nov. 19	Rice
Nov. 28	at Memphis

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Alex Hanks, S	★★★
2.	R.J. Blount, RB	★★★
3.	Jude Okeleke, DL	★★★
4.	Coen Logan, WR	★★★
5.	Antwuan Rogers, EDGE	★★★
6.	Hunter Watson, WR	★★★
7.	Brody Norman, QB	★★★
8.	Josh Nengite, EDGE	★★★
9.	Daron Harris, ATH	★★★
10.	Uyi Igiehon, EDGE	★★★

*Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: K.C. Keeler • Record at School: 5-7 (1 year) • Career Record: 276-119-1 (32 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Tyler Walker • Defensive Coordinator: Brian L. Smith • Location: Philadelphia, Pa. • Stadium: Lincoln Financial Field (67,594)

TULANE GREEN WAVE

NATIONAL FORECAST: 79 | AMERICAN PREDICTION: 7 | 2025 RECORD: 11-3, 7-1 AMERICAN

OFFENSE Retaining budding star running back Jamauri McClure gives new head coach Will Hall a dynamic playmaker to build around in a loaded backfield. McClure, who was fifth on the depth chart early last season, averaged 98 rushing yards and 6.5 yards per carry in Tulane's final five games while showing an ability to run both inside and outside. Tulane also has Maurice Turner, who won the starting job last preseason before sustaining a high ankle sprain in the opener, and Florida State transfer Jaylin Lucas. Both are versatile runners/receivers who fit Hall's system.

Dual-threat Zeon Chriss-Gremillion, a Houston transfer, and Kadin Semonza, who put up good numbers at Ball State in 2024 but was third string last year at Tulane, will compete for the starting quarterback job in preseason camp. Anthony Brown-Stephens (41 catches, 523 yards, two TDs) and Zycarl Lewis Jr. (24 catches, 330 yards) are the top returning receivers for a group that lost leading wideout Shazz Preston to Indiana but added speedy LSU transfer Destyn Hill.

The lone returning starting lineman, Reese Baker, has moved inside to guard from tackle.

DEFENSE Six of the top 10 tacklers return, a testament to the continuity on a staff that retained key assistants from former head coach Jon Sumrall's tenure. Safety Jack Tchienchou (83 tackles) was the defensive MVP of the American Conference Championship Game. Linebacker Dickson Agu was leading the team in tackles before tearing an ACL in the fifth game. Linebacker Chris Rodgers (80 tackles) returned an interception for a TD in the championship game. Safety Kevin Adams III was fourth on the team with 53 tackles despite never starting.

Although the line lost five stalwarts to Power 4 programs, the Green Wave were incredibly deep up front and should not have a significant drop-off there. Sumrall said several times last season that some of his backups who rarely played were good enough to start elsewhere.

SPECIALISTS Sumrall took both specialists with him to Florida, but transfer Jackson Courville was 26-of-34 on field goals in two years at Ball State (2023-24) and hit a pair from 50-plus yards in 2024. Punting is a concern. The coaches love Lucas' potential on returns.

FINAL ANALYSIS As an assistant, Hall was part of a winning culture at Tulane under Willie Fritz and Sumrall. He put together a top-notch staff and kept far more players than his conference brethren that also lost coaches. If the quarterback play is good enough — a big if — the Green Wave can reach their fifth consecutive league title game.

JACK TCHIENCHOU

SCOUTING THE GREEN WAVE

"The reason why they [promoted Will Hall to head coach after Jon Sumrall's departure for Florida] was because they wanted to have some continuity within that building, and everyone is expecting them to keep trudging on. The success that they've had has been undeniable, so it made sense for them to stick around with something that they know well to try and keep players and coaches intact. ... The thing working for them is that they have enough money to retain the guys that aren't the Darian Mensahs of the world. They have the funds there to be able to prevent guys from leaving for the lower-level Power 4 programs."

— An opposing American assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (2)

WR	5	**ANTHONY BROWN-STEPHENS (SR.)**	8	Bredell Richardson* (So.)
WR	15	Zycarl Lewis Jr. (So.)	16	Garrett Mmahat (Sr.)
WR	2	Destyn Hill* (Jr.)	80	Oliver Mitchell Jr. (So.)
LT	55	Dominic Steward (So.)	70	Juelz Baptiste (Fr.)
LG	73	Elijah Baker (So.)	60	Jaxon Ducre (So.)
C	51	John Bock II (Sr.)	60	Gavin Marks (So.)
RG	**78**	**REESE BAKER (SO.)**	59	Andre Amos Jr. (Fr.)
RT	58	Ryan Mickow* (Jr.)	52	Tristen Fortenberry (So.)
TE	86	Gabe Lovorn (Fr.)	13	Ty Thompson (Sr.)
QB	9	Zeon Chriss-Gremillion* (Sr.)	3	Kadin Semonza (Jr.)
RB	25	Jamauri McClure (So.)	0	Maurice Turner (Sr.)

DEFENSE (4)

DE	10	Gerrod Henderson (Sr.)	99	Josh Lewis (Fr.)
DT	45	Ed Smith* (Sr.)	96	Geordan Guidry (So.)
DT	94	Derrick Shepard Jr. (Sr.)	98	PaLanding Drammeh (Fr.)
OLB	48	Jah'rie Garner (Jr.)	40	Warren Roberts Jr. (Fr.)
ILB	**2**	**DICKSON AGU (JR.)**	42	Makai Williams (Sr.)
ILB	**4**	**CHRIS RODGERS (SR.)**	11	Dalton Hughes* (Sr.)
CB	**5**	**E'ZAIAH SHINE (SO.)**	22	Justin Agu* (Sr.)
CB	21	Marquez Stevenson* (Jr.)	9	LJ Green (Jr.)
NB	13	TJ Smith (Sr.)	24	Michael Igbinoghene (Fr.)
S	**1**	**JACK TCHIENCHOU (JR.)**	30	Joshua Moore (Jr.)
S	7	Kevin Adams III (Jr.)	27	Chase Green (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	96	Jackson Courville* (Jr.)	KR	12	Jaylin Lucas* (Sr.)
P	34	William Hudlow (Jr.)	PR	12	Jaylin Lucas* (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

2025 RESULTS (11-3, 7-1 AMERICAN)

Aug. 30	Northwestern	W	23-3
Sept. 6	at South Alabama	W	33-31
Sept. 13	Duke	W	34-27
Sept. 20	at Ole Miss	L	10-45
Sept. 27	at Tulsa	W	31-14
Oct. 9	East Carolina	W	26-19
Oct. 18	Army	W	24-17
Oct. 30	at UTSA	L	26-48
Nov. 7	at Memphis	W	38-32
Nov. 15	Florida Atlantic	W	35-24
Nov. 22	at Temple	W	37-13
Nov. 29	Charlotte	W	27-0
Dec. 5	North Texas #	W	34-21
Dec. 20	at Ole Miss %	L	10-41

#AAC Championship %CFB Playoff First Round

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	at Duke
Sept. 12	South Alabama
Sept. 19	at Kansas State
Sept. 26	Southern Miss
Oct. 10	at Army
Oct. 16	Memphis
Oct. 24	UTSA
Oct. 30	at Charlotte
Nov. 7	Tulsa
Nov. 14	at Rice
Nov. 21	North Texas
Nov. 27	at South Florida

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Jordyn Crites, DL	★★★★
2.	Tylan George, IOL	★★★
3.	Aiden Martin, OT	★★★
4.	Cayden Dees, DL	★★★
5.	Gary Hadley Jr., WR	★★★
6.	Myrone Jean, S	★★★
7.	Orion Saunders, CB	★★★
8.	LJ Moton, S	★★★
9.	AJ Westfield, DL	★★★
10.	Nick Witherspoon, DL	★★★

*Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Will Hall • Record at School: First Season
Career Record: 70-50 (9+ seasons) • Offensive Coordinator: Russ Callaway
Defensive Coordinators: Tayler Polk, Nate Fuqua • Location: New Orleans, La.
Stadium: Yulman Stadium (30,000)

STEPHEN LEW-IMAGN IMAGES

BAYLOR HAYES

WILLIAM PURNELL-IMAGN IMAGES

SCOUTING THE HURRICANE

"[Head coach] Tre Lamb is doing what he's supposed to do. He's trying to get people to talk about Tulsa because that's where it starts. I thought them doing the open house deal for the transfer portal was cool. I liked it. He's a young coach, so he's bringing that flavor for the other young coaches who are getting that opportunity. Tulsa is a private university, so for them to do something innovative like that, he's changing that mold over there. ... I know a lot of people that know [Lamb] personally, and everyone has said nothing but great things about that guy. I'm excited to see him continue to try and turn the direction of that program around."

— An opposing American assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (2)				
WR	1	David Wells Jr.* (Jr.)	0	Donnell Gee Jr. (So.)
WR	7	Jimmy Calloway* (Sr.)	19	Grayson Tempest (Sr.)
WR	2	Oran Singleton Jr.* (Sr.)	15	Josh Smith (So.)
LT	77	Brody Duffel (Jr.)	70	Alan Pond* (Jr.)
LG	52	Ian Mayes (So.)	76	Josh Love (So.)
C	66	Will Morris (Jr.)	50	Malachi Preciado* (Sr.)
RG	60	Hunter Erb (Sr.)	51	Javion Antai (Fr.)
RT	**73**	**CAM EAST (SR.)**	53	Jack Hood (So.)
TE	84	Jewlyen Roberts (So.)	11	Grant McAtee* (Jr.)
QB	**10**	**BAYLOR HAYES (SO.)**	5	Dexter Williams II (Sr.)*
RB	20	Trequan Jones* (Sr.)	23	Seth Davis* (Jr.)
DEFENSE (6)				
DL	10	Arias Nash* (Sr.)	32	Hudson Ball (So.)
DL	**99**	**TAI NEWHOUSE (SR.)**	88	Dailen Howard* (Sr.)
DL	0	Kyran Duhon* (Jr.)	58	Tyler Rich (Jr.)
DL	15	Thomas Davis* (Sr.)	11	Jaylen George* (Sr.)
LB	6	Chris Thompson Jr. (Sr.)	25	Sam Stone (Fr.)
LB	35	C.J. Turner (Jr.)	**33**	**WILLIAM ALEXANDER (JR.)**
CB	**3**	**JD DREW (SR.)**	16	Caldra Williford* (Sr.)
CB	**7**	**ELIJAH GREEN (JR.)**	13	NuNu Campbell (Sr.)
STAR	**2**	**DEVIN ROBINSON (JR.)**	37	Rohon Kazadi* (Fr.)
S	12	Dedaunte Scott (So.)	4	Tyson Williams* (Sr.)
S	**1**	**ZACH WILLIAMS (JR.)**	5	Ashton Williams (Jr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	18	Marlon Hauck* (Sr.)	KR 20	Trequan Jones* (Sr.)
P	29	Max Tulen* (Jr.)	PR 2	Oran Singleton Jr.* (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

TULSA GOLDEN HURRICANE

NATIONAL FORECAST: 108 | AMERICAN PREDICTION: 10 | 2025 RECORD: 4-8, 1-7 AMERICAN

OFFENSE Second-year head coach Tre Lamb is trusting his offense to baby-faced sophomore quarterback Baylor Hayes. Coaches rave about Hayes' "It Factor," something he showed off in Tulsa's 19-12 upset win at Oklahoma State in 2025.

Hayes made nine starts a year ago, including the last six. He threw for 2,158 yards and 12 touchdowns, but it's his running threat (376 yards before sacks) that makes him the right fit for Lamb's offense.

Hayes figures to benefit from a relatively experienced offensive line that features returning starter Cam East at right tackle and six others who combined to appear in 32 games a year ago. But TU must replace its three leading rushers and receivers.

The Hurricane did get a late boost in the portal by signing running back Trequan Jones from Old Dominion. Pro Football Focus had Jones as the third-highest graded transfer RB.

DEFENSE TU's defense was greatly improved in 2025, but an epidemic of big plays plagued the unit as the season progressed. Six players who started last year's season finale against UAB return, led by cornerback Elijah Green, who led the American Conference with five interceptions, and safety Zach Williams, who had 73 tackles and two forced fumbles.

But the Hurricane must fill a huge hole in the middle, as leading tackler Ray Coney (an American-leading 129 stops) moved on to Texas A&M. Linebacker Chris Thompson Jr., a 2025 team captain who missed the season after breaking his ankle during fall camp, returns.

SPECIALISTS TU spent the spring holding auditions at placekicker and punter. Marlon Hauck emerged at kicker after transferring from Mississippi State, where he attempted two extra points and no field goals over four seasons. The Hurricane are hoping to again tap into the Australian punter pipeline after Torquay native Angus Davies started the last three seasons. FCS Bethune-Cookman transfer Max Tulen of Melbourne takes over after averaging 44.6 yards on 44 attempts in 2025.

FINAL ANALYSIS TU earned rave reviews for its "Portal House," an upscale rental home the school used to host staff and recruits during the January transfer window. The team was in need of a feel-good story after a 4-8 record in Lamb's first season — one marked by only marginal progress from 2024. In the end, the real measure of success for the "Portal House" will be the product TU puts on the field. Lamb is confident that he's the right man to take advantage of the American's coaching upheaval. And if a few of those social media stars from the "Portal House" live up to their billing on the field, TU could be a pleasant surprise.

2025 RESULTS (4-8, 1-7 AMERICAN)

Aug. 30	Abilene Christian	W	35-7
Sept. 6	at New Mexico State	L	14-21
Sept. 13	Navy	L	23-42
Sept. 19	at Oklahoma State	W	19-12
Sept. 27	Tulane	L	14-31
Oct. 4	at Memphis	L	7-45
Oct. 16	at East Carolina	L	27-41
Oct. 25	Temple (ot)	L	37-38
Nov. 8	at Florida Atlantic	L	21-40
Nov. 15	Oregon State	W	31-14
Nov. 22	at Army	W	26-25
Nov. 29	UAB	L	24-31

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	Oklahoma State
Sept. 12	at Sam Houston
Sept. 19	East Texas A&M
Sept. 26	at Arkansas
Oct. 1	North Texas
Oct. 10	at Navy
Oct. 17	at Rice
Oct. 23	Army
Nov. 7	at Tulane
Nov. 14	Florida Atlantic
Nov. 21	Charlotte
Nov. 28	at UTSA

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1. Jamarcea Plater, RB ★★★
2. Aaron Edwards, S ★★★
3. Alan Pond, IOL ★★★
4. Dawson Matthews, OT ★★★
5. Keynan Farley, CB ★★★
6. Deminio Patterson, DL ★★★
7. Carter Langenderfer, S ★★★
8. Kadin Fossung, EDGE ★★★
9. Kyden Barker, QB ★★★
10. Xavier Green, WR ★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Tre Lamb • Record at School: 4-8 (1 year) • Career Record: 31-33 (5+ years) • Offensive Coordinators: Kevin Barbay, Ty Darlington • Defensive Coordinator: Josh Reardon • Location: Tulsa, Okla. • Stadium: H.A. Chapman Stadium (30,000)

UAB BLAZERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 121 | AMERICAN PREDICTION: 13 | 2025 RECORD: 4-8, 2-6 AMERICAN

OFFENSE Quarterback Ryder Burton enters his fourth season of college football but his first as the clear-cut starter. The 6-foot-2, 200-pound Utah native threw for 251 yards and three touchdowns while engineering the memorable upset win over Memphis in his first career start. His only other start came in a loss to Rice when he threw for 213 yards and a pair of touchdowns. Look for Burton to take a huge leap this year.

It is helpful that a loaded backfield that includes 6-foot-1, 235-pound Georgia transfer Rod Robinson II can fuel the offense if needed. Injuries slowed Robinson's progression at Georgia, but if he remains healthy, the San Diego native can be a great power runner. Coastal Carolina transfer Ja'Vin Simpkins and ULM transfer Bam McReynolds rushed for a combined 1,228 yards and five touchdowns last year.

Wide receiver depth could be dicey if Kaleb Brown can't come back from a spring ankle injury, but there is some talent there. Tight end Antonio Ferguson is poised for a breakout season.

Depth should be a strength for an offensive line led by returnees Adam Lepkowski and Calib Perez.

DEFENSE Veteran defensive coordinator Todd Grantham has put his stamp on a defense that was quickly rebuilt through the transfer portal. The unit should be strong up the middle with defensive tackles Cam Cunningham, Chris Spencer and Nigel Tate, inside linebackers Muaaz Byard and Ike Esonwune and safeties Jeremiah Jordan and Jotavian Pierce.

Esonwune played in Grantham's system at Oklahoma State last season and contributed 31 tackles. The 6-foot-3, 330-pound Tate was slated to anchor the defense last season but suffered a torn Achilles in fall camp. Delvon Gulley returns at cornerback after an up-and-down season. Marshall transfer Darrell Sweeting could be the best coverage cornerback.

Defensive end Marlin Dean, who began his college career at Georgia and is on his fourth team, is a 6-foot-5, 240-pound presence on the edge. Opposite Dean, Blanche Gold is a bit undersized but is a twitchy, intriguing prospect from FCS Morgan State. Grantham and his defensive staff have also managed to build some depth.

SPECIALISTS Placekicker Jonah Delange has made 31-of-38 field goals and all 60 extra-point attempts in two seasons as the team's starter. The only other returning specialist is Owen Simpson, who handles kickoffs.

FINAL ANALYSIS There is a great unknown in Alex Mortensen's first full season as the Blazers' head coach. The program fell into a ditch in Trent Dilfer's three-year tenure. If his team can stay healthy, then Mortensen just might be the coach to get them back on the road.

2025 RESULTS (4-8, 2-6 AMERICAN)

Aug. 28	Alabama State	W	52-42
Sept. 6	at Navy	L	24-38
Sept. 13	Akron	W	31-28
Sept. 20	at Tennessee	L	24-56
Oct. 4	Army	L	13-31
Oct. 11	at Florida Atlantic	L	33-53
Oct. 18	Memphis	W	31-24
Nov. 1	at UConn	L	19-38
Nov. 8	at Rice	L	17-24
Nov. 15	North Texas	L	24-53
Nov. 22	South Florida	L	18-48
Nov. 29	at Tulsa	W	31-24

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	at Illinois
Sept. 12	ULM
Sept. 19	at Louisiana
Sept. 25	Navy
Oct. 3	Samford
Oct. 10	at Memphis
Oct. 15	East Carolina
Oct. 31	at South Florida
Nov. 7	Charlotte
Nov. 14	at Temple
Nov. 21	UTSA
Nov. 28	at North Texas

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1. Jayson Moll, RB ★★★
2. Malachi Character, LB ★★★
3. Hudson Higgins, RB ★★★
4. Mykale Hrabowski, S ★★★
5. Barrett Maddox, OT ★★★
6. Jayden Skelton, WR ★★★
7. JP Price, CB ★★★
8. Wes Wiggins, IOL ★★★
9. Colby Archie, EDGE ★★★
10. Brogan McNab, QB ★★★

**Per Rivals*

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Alex Mortensen • Record at School: 2-4 (1 year) • Career Record: 2-4 (1 year) • Offensive Coordinator: Alex Mortensen • Defensive Coordinator: Todd Grantham • Location: Birmingham, Ala. • Stadium: Protective Stadium (47,100)

RYDER BURTON

SCOUTING THE BLAZERS

"It sounded like [former head coach] Trent Dilfer didn't have a ton of respect for the place. Like, he just took it as a job to be a head coach at the college level and never really took a lot of pride in the place itself. The way that he treated people, I heard, was not the best. I know a lot of staff members left there unhappy. Everything I've heard, [new head coach] Alex Mortensen is the opposite of Dilfer. I don't know if that's what was the draw with [Mortensen], but he's a likeable guy who treats people well. ... From what I've been told, [Mortensen] actually wanted that job. It didn't just fall to him. I think he'll do well. It may take a little time to get his fingerprints on it, but he should be fine."

— An opposing American assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (2)

WR	1	CJ Smith* (Sr.)	9	AJ Johnson (Sr.)
WR	8	Kaleb Brown (Sr.)	6	KJ Daniels* (So.)
WR	0	Ty Mims* (Sr.)	4	EJ Reid* (So.)
LT	51	Payton Kirkland (So.)	77	Keyon Cox* (Jr.)
LG	64	Cooper Young* (Jr.)	66	Donovan Lawrence (So.)
C	**68**	**ADAM LEPKOWSKI (SR.)**	69	Kade Martin (So.)
RG	**75**	**CALIB PEREZ (SR.)**	74	Barry Walker (So.)
RT	71	Kyrik Mason (Sr.)	55	Barrett Maddox* (Jr.)
TE	85	Antonio Ferguson (Jr.)	44	Scott Isacks* (Sr.)
QB	5	Ryder Burton (Jr.)	16	Nate Rogers (So.)
RB	2	Rod Robinson II* (Jr.)	3	Bam McReynolds* (Sr.)

DEFENSE (0)

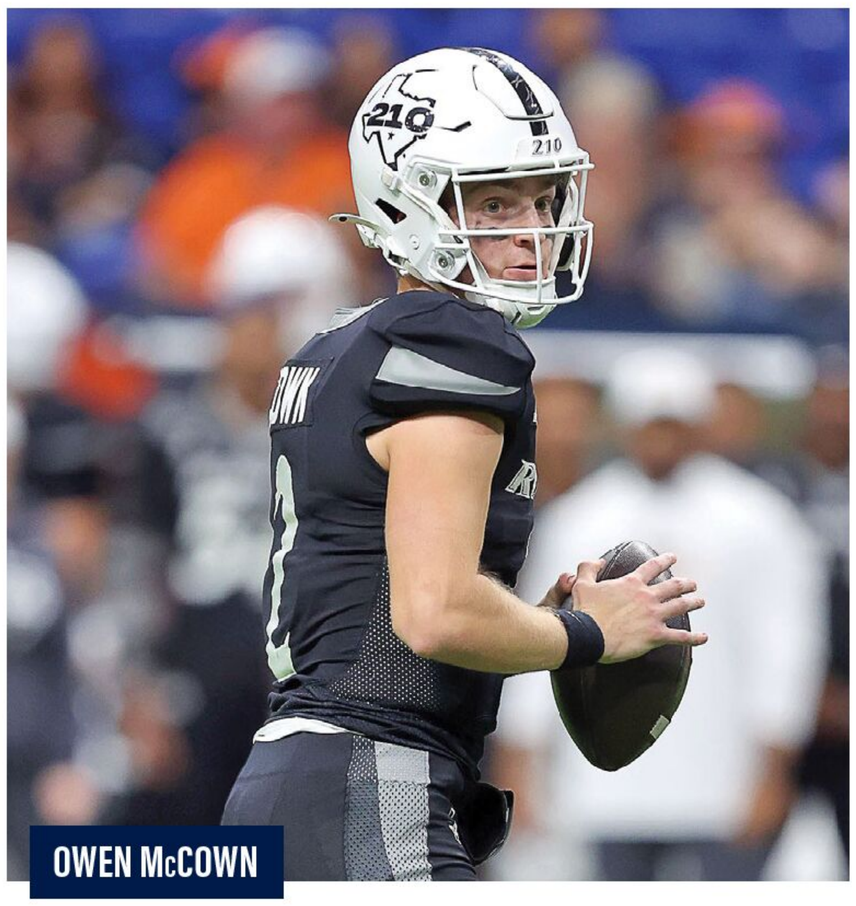
DE	7	Blanche Gold* (Sr.)	58	J'Quan Mason (So.)
DT	95	Cam Cunningham* (Sr.)	8	Nigel Tate (Sr.)
DL	90	Chris Spencer* (Sr.)	9	Noah Nelson (Sr.)
DE	5	Marlin Dean* (Sr.)	59	Chris Burge (So.)
ILB	3	Ike Esonwune* (Jr.)	33	Braden Sullivan* (Jr.)
ILB	35	Muaaz Byard* (Sr.)	21	Shaun Myers* (Sr.)
CB	1	Darrell Sweeting* (Jr.)	2	Guylijah Theodule* (Jr.)
CB	5	Delvon Gulley (Jr.)	16	Isaiah Crozier (Jr.)
NB	11	Anta'Veon McKenzie* (So.)	6	Que Billingsley* (Jr.)
S	0	Jotavian Pierce* (So.)	25	Jaylen Thompson* (So.)
S	13	Jeremiah Jordan* (Sr.)	10	Kris Wokomah* (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	39	Jonah Delange (Sr.)	KR	6	KJ Daniels* (So.)
P	32	Badger Hargett* (Jr.)	PR	0	Ty Mims* (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

DAVID BUTLER II-IMAGN IMAGES



OWEN McCOWN

SCOUTING THE ROADRUNNERS

"They play at a high level week in, week out. [Head coach] Jeff Traylor always has those guys prepared. He's always about the players. He's never going to lose sight that it's always about those kids. Yes, there's been some turnover within the coaching staff, like with [losing offensive coordinator Justin Burke to Kentucky], and yes, that does hurt him because he has real relationships with his coaches. ... I don't know where they're gonna finish within the league because I know that they lost some key players to the portal and to graduation. But with those new guys, I trust [Traylor] to get them to buy in and play at the level that he expects them to."

— An opposing American assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)				
WR	18	**DAVID AMADOR II (JR.)**	19	TJ West* (Jr.)
WR	13	Jamel Hardy Jr. (Jr.)	17	James Madison II* (So.)
WR	84	AJ Wilson (Sr.)	15	DJ Allen Jr. (Sr.)
LT	70	**DEANDRE MARSHALL (SR.)**	75	Jonah Miller (Sr.)
LG	77	Devron Williams Jr. (So.)	66	Davion Hurth (So.)
C	57	**BEN RIOS (SR.)**	76	Luke Lapeze (Sr.)
RG	74	**DARRELL JONES (SR.)**	66	Davion Hurth (So.)
RT	71	**JAYLEN GARTH (SR.)**	73	A'marion Breland (Fr.)
TE	85	Ty Rupe (Fr.)	89	Brandon Young Jr.* (Jr.)
QB	13	**OWEN MCCOWN (SR.)**	11	Brandon Tennison (Jr.)
RB	11	Will Henderson III (So.)	10	Brandon High Jr.* (Jr.)
DEFENSE (2)				
DE	99	**TAI LEONARD (SR.)**	95	Drenon Fite III* (Sr.)
NT	98	Jameian Buxton (Sr.)	91	Jusiah Sampleton* (Sr.)
DE	19	Johnny Bowens III (So.)	94	Eddy Smith* (So.)
ILB	23	Brandon Tucker (Sr.)	44	Darion White (Sr.)
ILB	13	**OWEN PEWEE (SR.)**	34	James Walley Jr. (Jr.)
OLB	12	Camron Cooper (Jr.)	32	Elijah Baldwin* (So.)
CB	18	Ahamad Chapman (So.)	17	Asaad Chapman* (Jr.)
CB	24	RJ Lester Jr. (So.)	27	Jakevian Rodgers (Jr.)
NB	10	Archie Chambers* (Jr.)	26	Bryce Grays (Sr.)
S	25	Nate Robinson Jr.* (Jr.)	29	Xavier Walton* (Sr.)
S	22	Elijah Newell (So.)	11	Cam Upshaw Jr. (Jr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	92	Michael Petro (Jr.)	KR 14	Mekhi Anderson (So.)
P	20	Caile Hogan (Jr.)	PR 18	David Amador II (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

DANNY WILD-IMAGN IMAGES

UTSA ROADRUNNERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 73 | AMERICAN PREDICTION: 3 | 2025 RECORD: 7-6, 4-4 AMERICAN

OFFENSE New offensive coordinator Rick Bowie has designs on pushing UTSA's tempo and unleashing more downfield shots. Quarterback Owen McCown was limited during spring practice as he recovered from surgery to repair a sports hernia, but he enters his third year as a starter with the potential to emerge as one of the top signal-callers in the Group of 6 if he can avoid the injuries that nagged him last season.

Speedy running back Will Henderson III broke out with 866 yards and six touchdowns last season, and the Roadrunners also bring back standout receivers David Amador II and AJ Wilson. Running back Brandon High Jr. (Cal) and receivers TJ West (Texas Tech) and James Madison II (Missouri) are expected to be impact transfers. Despite new faces at tight end and left guard, expectations are high for UTSA's offense.

DEFENSE The Roadrunners lost the bulk of their defense to graduation or the transfer portal and spent the spring looking to reload. Inside linebacker Brandon Tucker, a former FCS All-America selection and Southland Conference Defense Player of the Year at East Texas A&M, seems most likely to step in as the leader of the unit after taking a rotational role last season. Veteran Owen Pewee is projected to join him on the inside, making the shift from nickel for his final season.

The Roadrunners have long taken pride in a strong, deep defensive line, and ends Tai Leonard and Johnny Bowens III and nose Jameian Buxton are expected to anchor the unit. UTSA will rely on Camron Cooper — still recovering from a knee injury in last year's opener — to provide a pass-rush threat at outside linebacker alongside UTEP transfer Elijah Baldwin.

FCS Marist transfer Nate Robinson Jr., a San Antonio native, could be a Day 1 starter at safety, while the cornerback position might be manned by a pair of brothers: sophomore Ahamad Chapman and incoming junior-college transfer Asaad Chapman.

SPECIALISTS UTSA returns all of last year's primary options on special teams. Michael Petro connected on 17-of-20 field goals in 2025, while Caile Hogan averaged 45.7 yards per punt. Amador was the leading punt returner, while fellow wideout Mekhi Anderson handled kickoffs, but both spots will likely be open for competition.

FINAL ANALYSIS In the transient world of college football, having a seventh-year head coach in Jeff Traylor and a third-year quarterback in McCown makes UTSA an outlier that will face high expectations. The Roadrunners have posted winning records in every season of Traylor's tenure, and though keeping up with the most well-resourced programs in the American Conference will be daunting, UTSA should remain in the hunt.

2025 RESULTS (7-6, 4-4 AMERICAN)

Aug. 30	at Texas A&M	L	24-42
Sept. 6	Texas State	L	36-43
Sept. 13	Incarnate Word	W	48-20
Sept. 20	at Colorado State	W	17-16
Oct. 4	at Temple	L	21-27
Oct. 11	Rice	W	61-13
Oct. 18	at North Texas	L	17-55
Oct. 30	Tulane	W	48-26
Nov. 6	at South Florida	L	23-55
Nov. 15	at Charlotte	W	28-7
Nov. 22	East Carolina	W	58-24
Nov. 29	Army	L	24-27
Dec. 26	vs. FIU #	W	57-20

#First Responder Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	UTRGV
Sept. 12	at Texas State
Sept. 19	at Texas
Sept. 26	Colorado State
Oct. 3	at Rice
Oct. 8	South Florida
Oct. 17	Navy
Oct. 24	at Tulane
Nov. 5	at Florida Atlantic
Nov. 14	North Texas
Nov. 21	at UAB
Nov. 28	Tulsa

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Jarvse Dickerson, S	★★★
2.	Cael Meisman, WR	★★★
3.	Asaad Chapman, CB	★★★
4.	Jacob Lopez-Veasey, EDGE	★★★
5.	Chris Dupree, WR	★★★
6.	Derek Straughn, CB	★★★
7.	Mykha Green, RB	★★★
8.	Sekope Wallace, OT	★★★
9.	Archie Chambers, LB	★★★
10.	Brandon Brown, LB	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Jeff Traylor • Record at School: 53-26 (6 years)
Career Record: 53-26 (6 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Rick Bowie
Defensive Coordinator: Jess Loepp • Location: San Antonio, Texas
Stadium: Alamodome (64,000)

BIG 12 PREVIEW

PREDICTED ORDER OF FINISH

1. TEXAS TECH RED RAIDERS
2. BYU COUGARS
3. HOUSTON COUGARS
4. UTAH UTES
5. KANSAS STATE WILDCATS
6. ARIZONA WILDCATS
7. ARIZONA STATE SUN DEVILS
8. OKLAHOMA STATE COWBOYS
9. TCU HORNED FROGS
10. WEST VIRGINIA MOUNTAINEERS
11. KANSAS JAYHAWKS
12. BAYLOR BEARS
13. CINCINNATI BEARCATS
14. COLORADO BUFFALOES
15. UCF KNIGHTS
16. IOWA STATE CYCLONES

BIG 12 CHAMPIONSHIP

TEXAS TECH OVER BYU

ALL-BIG 12 TEAM

FIRST-TEAM OFFENSE		
QB	NOAH FIFITA	Arizona
RB	LJ MARTIN	BYU
RB	CAM COOK	West Virginia
AP	CALEB HAWKINS	Oklahoma State
WR	AMARE THOMAS	Houston
WR	OMARION MILLER	Arizona State
WR	WYATT YOUNG	Oklahoma State
TE	TERRANCE CARTER JR.	Texas Tech
C	BRUCE MITCHELL	BYU
OL	JOE COTTON	Cincinnati
OL	EVAN TENGESDAHL	Cincinnati
OL	JOHN PASTORE	Kansas State
OL	SHADRE HURST	Houston

FIRST-TEAM DEFENSE		
DL	A.J. HOLMES JR.	Texas Tech
DL	MATEEN IBIROGBA	Texas Tech
DL	WENDELL GREGORY	Kansas State
DL	ADAM TRICK	Texas Tech
LB	AUSTIN ROMAINE	Texas Tech
LB	TAYE BROWN	Arizona
LB	CADE ULUAVE	BYU
LB	BEN ROBERTS	Texas Tech
CB	BRICE POLLOCK	Texas Tech
CB	WILL JAMES	Houston
S	JAMEL JOHNSON	TCU
S	FALETAU SATUALA	BYU

FIRST-TEAM SPECIALISTS		
K	STONE HARRINGTON	Texas Tech
P	PALMER WILLIAMS	Baylor
KR	BRYCE NOERNBERG	Kansas State
PR	MANA CARVALHO	Utah

BOWL PROJECTIONS

Rate: TCU vs. Illinois

Pop-Tarts: Houston vs. Louisville

Texas: Oklahoma State vs. Missouri

Independence: West Virginia vs. Kennesaw State

Alamo: BYU vs. USC

Sun: Utah vs. Virginia

Las Vegas: Arizona vs. Iowa

Armed Forces: Arizona State vs. Navy

Liberty: Kansas State vs. Auburn

College Football Playoff First Round: Texas Tech vs. Oregon

JOIN COLLEGE FOOTBALL EXPERT STEVEN LASSAN AT ATHLONSPORTS.COM FOR A LOOK AT SECOND- AND THIRD-TEAM SELECTIONS

COORDINATOR CAROUSEL

BAYLOR
Defense: New: Joe Klanderman
Old: Matt Powledge

BYU
Defense: New: Kelly Poppinga
Old: Jay Hill

CINCINNATI
Offense: New: Nic Cardwell, Pete Thomas; Old: Brad Glenn
Defense: New: Nate Woody, Cortney Braswell; Old: Tyson Veidt, Cortney Braswell

COLORADO
Offense: New: Brennan Marion
Old: Brett Bartolone (interim)
Defense: New: Chris Marve
Old: Robert Livingston

IOWA STATE
Offense: New: Tyler Roehl
Old: Taylor Mouser
Defense: New: Jesse Bobbit
Old: Jon Heacock

KANSAS
Offense: New: Andy Kotelnicki
Old: Jim Zebrowski, Matt Lubick

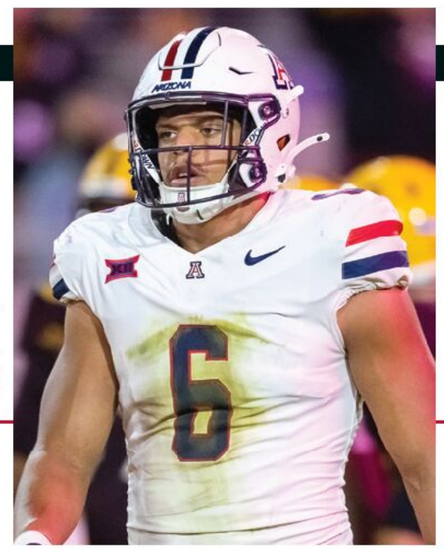
KANSAS STATE
Offense: New: Sean Gleeson
Old: Matt Wells
Defense: New: Jordan Peterson
Old: Joe Klanderman

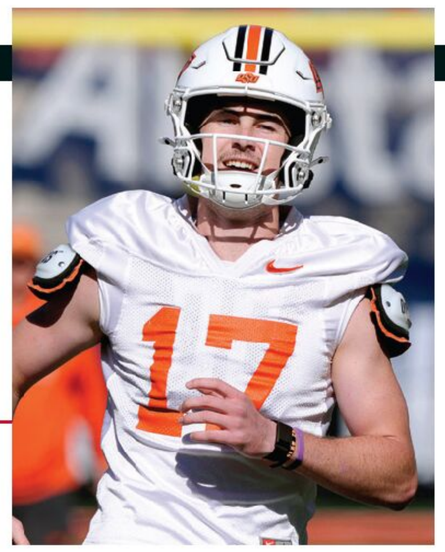
OKLAHOMA STATE
Offense: New: Sean Brophy
Old: Doug Meacham
Defense: New: Skyler Cassity
Old: Clint Bowen (interim)

TCU
Offense: New: Gordon Sammis, A.J. Ricker; Old: Kendal Briles

TEXAS TECH
Defense: New: Shiel Wood, Rob Greene; Old: Shiel Wood

UTAH
Offense: New: Kevin McGiven
Old: Jason Beck
Defense: New: Colton Swan
Old: Morgan Scalley





TAYE BROWN, ARIZONA
DREW MESTEMAKER, OKLAHOMA STATE

FROM LEFT: MARK J. REBILAS-IMAGN IMAGES; BRYAN TERRY/THE OKLAHOMAN

TOP TRANSFERS

	NAME	POS.	SCHOOL	FORMER SCHOOL
1.	**Drew Mestemaker**	QB	Oklahoma State	North Texas
	Mestemaker led the nation with more than 4,000 passing yards.			
2.	**Caleb Hawkins**	RB	Oklahoma State	North Texas
	Hawkins is a touchdown machine who followed his QB to the Big 12.			
3.	**Cam Cook**	RB	West Virginia	Jacksonville State
	All-American who led the country in rushing will run wild for Rich Rodriguez.			
4.	**Brendan Sorsby**	QB	Texas Tech	Cincinnati
	Sorsby's talent made him a coveted addition, but his availability is an open question.			
5.	**Mateen Ibirogba**	DL	Texas Tech	Wake Forest
	Ibirogba is a twitchy big body who should help Tech's defense reload.			
6.	**DJ Lagway**	QB	Baylor	Florida
	After battling injuries, the former 5-star prospect gets a fresh start in his home state.			
7.	**Danny Scudero**	WR	Colorado	San José State
	A ball magnet who led the FBS in receiving yards for the Spartans.			
8.	**Omarion Miller**	WR	Arizona State	Colorado
	Miller is following in Jordyn Tyson's footsteps; he'll hope to have the same success.			
9.	**Adam Trick**	DL	Texas Tech	Miami (Ohio)
	Trick is a proven disruptor off the edge for the Red Raiders' defense.			
10.	**Jaden Craig**	QB	TCU	Harvard
	The Crimson's all-time leading passer fills the void that Josh Hoover left.			

RECRUITING RANKINGS BY SCHOOL

1. Texas Tech (19)
2. West Virginia (27)
3. BYU (30)
4. Houston (32)
5. Utah (35)
6. Kansas State (41)
7. Arizona State (42)
8. Arizona (44)
9. Iowa State (45)
10. Cincinnati (47)
11. TCU (50)
12. Kansas (60)
13. UCF (61)
14. Oklahoma State (63)
15. Baylor (66)
16. Colorado (73)

Rankings per Rivals; National ranking in parentheses

GAMES TO WATCH

Sept. 12	Arizona at BYU
Sept. 19	Houston at Texas Tech
Oct. 10	Houston at Kansas State
Oct. 17	Notre Dame at BYU
Oct. 17	Arizona State at Texas Tech
Oct. 17	TCU at Baylor
Oct. 24	Kansas State at Arizona State
Oct. 24	Houston at Utah
Nov. 7	BYU at Utah
Nov. 14	Texas Tech at Oklahoma State
Nov. 14	Utah at Arizona
Nov. 28	Arizona State at Arizona

TOP 10 RECRUITS

	NAME	POS.	SCHOOL	RATING	NAT. RANK
1.	Keisean Henderson	QB	Houston	★★★★★+	4
2.	Kelvin Obot	OT	Utah	★★★★★	5
3.	Kevin Brown	IOL	West Virginia	★★★★	49
4.	LaDamion Guyton	EDGE	Texas Tech	★★★★	58
5.	Ryder Lyons	QB	BYU	★★★★	60
6.	Chase Campbell	WR	Texas Tech	★★★★	63
7.	Jake Fette	QB	Arizona State	★★★★	86
8.	RJ Mosley	WR	Arizona	★★★★	92
9.	Malachi Joyner	IOL	Arizona	★★★★	119
10.	Felix Ojo	OT	Texas Tech	★★★★	142

Rankings per Rivals; +Consensus 5-star prospect

ARIZONA WILDCATS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 32 | BIG 12 PREDICTION: 6 | 2025 RECORD: 9-4, 6-3 BIG 12

OFFENSE Arizona's offense returns the reigning first-team All-Big 12 quarterback in Noah Fifita, who became the first UA quarterback to receive first-team all-conference honors in 50 years. Fifita needs 829 yards to pass Nick Foles for the most career passing yards by an Arizona quarterback. Fifita already broke Foles' career passing touchdowns record last season and will likely go down as the statistical leader in every passing category at the UA when it's all said and done.

For the first time since becoming the starter, Fifita will have the same offensive coordinator as the previous season. Another year with rising play-caller Seth Doege could take Fifita — and the Arizona offense — to another gear. Arizona also returns a nucleus of wide receivers in Tre Spivey, veteran Chris Hunter and Giovanni Richardson, among others.

DEFENSE Defensive coordinator Danny Gonzales signed a contract extension this offseason and was named a Broyles Award semifinalist for the best assistant coach in college football. In the unit's first season under Gonzales, Arizona finished seventh nationally in passing defense and helped the team post a plus-18 turnover margin. The Wildcats had more takeaways (31) than touchdowns allowed (28) and led the Big 12 in interceptions (22), which tied for second nationally. They led college football in takeaways per game (2.4).

Arizona will have to replace a good chunk of the production, especially in the secondary following the loss of defensive backs Treydan Stukes, Genesis Smith and Dalton Johnson, who combined for 6,700 defensive snaps in their Arizona careers. The Wildcats signed eight defensive backs in the transfer portal in 2026, but replacing the heartbeat of Arizona's defensive secondary will be a tall task this fall.

SPECIALISTS Arizona placekicker Michael Salgado-Medina finished 19-for-31 on field-goal attempts in 2025, the most misses in a season for the UA since 1999, although snapping inconsistencies were a factor. Salgado-Medina was 5-for-12 between 40-49 yards but displayed leg strength with a 57-yarder against Oklahoma State, and he was more consistent throughout the spring. The Wildcats will have several new faces in the special teams unit, including Australian punter Chase Ridley, who will likely be the starter for the season opener against FCS Northern Arizona.

FINAL ANALYSIS Continuity is an underrated component to college football. Arizona has it for 2026. The Wildcats return all of their coordinators and most of their on-field staff. More importantly, the face of the franchise in Fifita returns for another season to put an exclamation point on his storied career at the UA.

NOAH FIFITA

SCOUTING THE WILDCATS

"[QB Noah Fifita] is freaking electric. He's one of the best quarterbacks in the country. His off-schedule playmaking ability is unbelievable. When he gets flushed out of the pocket, the play begins. I thought their wideouts were really good. Obviously, they didn't have a guy that was like [former Arizona wide receiver] Tetairoa McMillan, but they were pretty deep, and it felt like every other week, it was a different guy making plays. ... On defense, they're so different with [defensive coordinator] Danny Gonzales. No one in the league really plays like them. They're innovative up front, and they like to play a lot of man coverage on the back end. They had some corners and DBs who could win in man coverage, and any time you can do that, that's a recipe for success."

— An opposing Big 12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

		OFFENSE (4)		
WR	12	**TRE SPIVEY (JR.)**	4	DJ Jordan* (So.)
WR	11	Chris Hunter (Sr.)	10	Jordan Ross* (Jr.)
WR	5	Giovanni Richardson (So.)	84	Rodney Gallagher III* (Sr.)
LT	73	Matthew Lado (So.)	66	Jaxon Griffin (Fr.)
LG	59	Rhino Tapa'atoutai (Jr.)	77	Jake Griffin* (Jr.)
C	58	Zach Henning* (Jr.)	62	Javian Goo (Fr.)
RG	63	**ALEXANDER DOOST (JR.)**	79	Isaac Perez (Sr.)
RT	71	**TRISTAN BOUNDS (SR.)**	72	Louis Akpa (Fr.)
TE	14	Cole Rusk* (Sr.)	87	Tyler Powell (Sr.)
QB	1	**NOAH FIFITA (SR.)**	7	Sawyer Anderson (Fr.)
RB	3	Kedrick Reescano (Sr.)	24	Quincy Craig (Sr.)
		DEFENSE (4)		
DE	3	**TRE SMITH (SR.)**	42	Dominic Lolesio (Jr.)
DT	95	**LEROY PALU (SR.)**	96	Zac Siulepa (Jr.)
DT	99	Mays Pese (So.)	44	Prince Williams (Fr.)
LB	7	**CHASE KENNEDY (SR.)**	48	Cooper Blomstrom* (Sr.)
LB	6	**TAYE BROWN (SR.)**	11	Jabari Mann (So.)
LB	16	Everett Roussaw Jr.* (Sr.)	10	Myron Robinson (So.)
CB	8	Jay'Vion Cole (Sr.)	12	Dwight Bootle* (Jr.)
CB	9	Tyrese Boss* (So.)	25	Zuri Watson* (So.)
NB	15	Malcolm Hartzog* (Sr.)	20	Dajon Hinton (Fr.)
S	23	Gavin Hunter (Jr.)	13	Cam Chapa* (Jr.)
S	2	Daylen Austin* (Jr.)	17	Lee Molette III* (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	19	Michael Salgado-Medina (Jr.)	KR	84	Rodney Gallagher III* (Sr.)
P	37	Chase Ridley (Fr.)	PR	84	Rodney Gallagher III* (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

2025 RESULTS (9-4, 6-3 BIG 12)

Aug. 30	Hawai'i	W	40-6
Sept. 6	Weber State	W	48-3
Sept. 12	Kansas State	W	23-17
Sept. 27	at Iowa State	L	14-39
Oct. 4	Oklahoma State	W	41-13
Oct. 11	BYU (ot)	L	27-33
Oct. 18	at Houston	L	28-31
Nov. 1	at Colorado	W	52-17
Nov. 8	Kansas	W	24-20
Nov. 15	at Cincinnati	W	30-24
Nov. 22	Baylor	W	41-17
Nov. 28	at Arizona State	W	23-7
Jan. 2	vs. SMU #	L	19-24

#Holiday Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	Northern Arizona
Sept. 12	at BYU
Sept. 19	Northern Illinois
Sept. 26	at Washington St.
Oct. 3	Cincinnati
Oct. 10	at West Virginia
Oct. 24	Iowa State
Oct. 31	at Texas Tech
Nov. 7	TCU
Nov. 14	Utah
Nov. 21	at Kansas State
Nov. 28	Arizona State

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	R.J. Mosley, WR	★★★★
2.	Malachi Joyner, IOL	★★★★
3.	Justin Morales, IOL	★★★★
4.	Henry Gabalis, TE	★★★★
5.	Oscar Rios, QB	★★★
6.	Xaier Hiler, CB	★★★
7.	Keytrin Harris, DL	★★★
8.	Kevin Moorer, EDGE	★★★
9.	Harvie Moeai, EDGE	★★★
10.	Caleb Smith, WR	★★★

*Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Brent Brennan • Record at School: 13-12 (2 years)
Career Record: 47-60 (9 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Seth Doege
Defensive Coordinator: Danny Gonzales • Location: Tucson, Ariz.
Stadium: Casino Del Sol Stadium (50,782)

MARK J. REBILAS-IMAGN IMAGES

ADRIAN WILSON

SCOUTING THE SUN DEVILS

"I've been impressed with who they picked up in the portal. The question is, how do those pieces in the portal come together? They're a tough, physical team, and in the Big 12, it's more finesse offenses. ... They're better across the board; they're better at wideout. I know they had Jordyn Tyson, but he was kind of in and out of the lineup. [Colorado transfer receiver] Omarion Miller is a special player, [Boston College transfer receiver] Reed Harris is a special player, and they have some young guys that they like. ... I think they'll be better on both sides of the line of scrimmage, just with the way they've been recruiting. They'll lose a bit of production in the backfield because I thought Raleek Brown was really, really good. But I'm expecting them to be good."

— An opposing Big 12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (0)

WR	4	Omarion Miller* (Sr.)	18	Jalen Moss (Sr.)
WR	3	Reed Harris* (Jr.)	16	Jaren Hamilton (Jr.)
WR	7	Raiden Vines-Bright* (So.)	5	Derek Eusebio (Jr.)
LT	76	Champ Westbrooks (So.)	75	Jarmaine Mitchell* (Jr.)
LG	64	Wade Helton (So.)	74	Siosaia Lapuaho* (Jr.)
C	58	Tana Alo-Tupuola* (Jr.)	64	Wade Helton (So.)
RG	59	Maki Stewart (So.)	53	Rob Lapuaho (Fr.)
RT	78	Luke Baklenko* (Sr.)	70	Jalen Klemm (Sr.)
TE	15	Khamari Anderson (Sr.)	85	Anthony Miller* (Jr.)
QB	8	Cutter Boley* (So.)	2	Jake Fette (Fr.)
RB	1	Kyson Brown (Jr.)	28	Marquis Gillis* (Sr.)

DEFENSE (2)

DE	9	Jalen Thompson* (Sr.)	98	Julian Hugo (Fr.)
DT	**99**	**C.J. FITE (JR.)**	97	Blazen Lono-Wong (Jr.)
DT	93	MyKeil Gardner (So.)	92	Zac Swanson (Jr.)
DE	10	Clayton Smith (Sr.)	32	Emar'rion Winston* (Sr.)
ILB	22	Owen Long* (Jr.)	49	Prayer Young-Blackgoat (So.)
ILB	8	Martell Hughes (Jr.)	30	Zyrus Fiaseu (Sr.)
CB	1	Ashton Stamps* (Jr.)	16	Nigel Pringle* (Fr.)
CB	0	Rodney Bimage Jr. (So.)	19	Daquwan Dunn (Fr.)
NB	**6**	**ADRIAN WILSON (JR.)**	12	Ben Alefaio-Lilii (Fr.)
SS	7	Montana Warren (Jr.)	20	Maurice Williams (Jr.)
FS	5	Lyrik Rawls* (Sr.)	23	Jessiah McGrew* (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	38	Carson Smith* (Sr.)	KR	16	Jaren Hamilton (Jr.)
P	35	Nick McLarty* (So.)	PR	84	Cory Butler Jr. (Fr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

ARIZONA STATE SID

ARIZONA STATE SUN DEVILS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 35 | BIG 12 PREDICTION: 7 | 2025 RECORD: 8-5, 6-3 BIG 12

OFFENSE The Sun Devils will lean heavily on the No. 15 transfer portal class (per 247Sports) to overcome the departures of most of their starters to graduation or transfer, including quarterback Sam Leavitt's move to LSU. Cutter Boley, who started for Kentucky as a redshirt freshman, will likely be the triggerman of an offense that added the nation's top-ranked wide receiver transfer class, headlined by Omarion Miller (Colorado) and Reed Harris (Boston College) and one that also includes Raiden Vines-Bright (Washington). All three look like future NFL Draft picks.

Center Tana Alo-Tupuola, who helped Georgia Tech rank as one of the top rushing attacks in the FBS last season, will help stabilize an offensive line that also added transfer Luke Baklenko — a former starter at Stanford who played at Oklahoma last season — at right tackle.

ASU's backfield is deep and talented, with 2025 opening-game starter Kyson Brown back at full strength after a season-ending injury and newcomer Marquis Gillis, who rushed for more than 1,100 yards at FCS Delaware State last season, a potent addition.

DEFENSE ASU should again be very stout, led by all-conference candidate C.J. Fite at nose tackle and transfer ends Jalen Thompson (Michigan State) and Emar'rion Winston (Baylor). Owen Long, the FBS' leading tackler last season at Colorado State, will help replace second-team All-Big 12 linebackers Jordan Crook and Keyshaun Elliott, with sixth-year returner Zyrus Fiaseu and Martell Hughes also starter-level players.

The secondary could be ASU's biggest question, especially the all-important nickel position, where Adrian "Boogie" Wilson could start in a move from free safety. Ashton Stamps, a two-year starter at LSU, will help replace Keith Abney II and Javan Robinson at cornerback, with sophomore Rodney Bimage Jr. ready to shine. Senior free safety Lyrik Rawls was a key addition after leading Kansas with 57 solo tackles last season.

SPECIALISTS Big-legged Australian punter Nick McLarty, an Ohio State transfer, should help ASU improve from second-worst in the FBS in net punting in '25. Austin Peay transfer placekicker Carson Smith earned Specialist of the Year honors in the FCS United Athletic Conference.

FINAL ANALYSIS Although they look deeper and more talented than head coach Kenny Dillingham's prior three teams, the Sun Devils will need to prove that they didn't regress too much at quarterback with their move from Leavitt to Boley. The Sun Devils are likely to be pegged to finish in the middle of the Big 12, but they look better than that. A brutal schedule won't help them show it in the win column, though.

2025 RESULTS (8-5, 6-3 BIG 12)

Aug. 30	Northern Arizona	W	38-19
Sept. 6	at Mississippi State	L	20-24
Sept. 13	Texas State	W	34-15
Sept. 20	at Baylor	W	27-24
Sept. 26	TCU	W	27-24
Oct. 11	at Utah	L	10-42
Oct. 18	Texas Tech	W	26-22
Oct. 25	Houston	L	16-24
Nov. 1	at Iowa State	W	24-19
Nov. 15	West Virginia	W	25-23
Nov. 22	at Colorado	W	42-17
Nov. 28	Arizona	L	7-23
Dec. 31	vs. Duke #	L	39-42

#Sun Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	Morgan State
Sept. 12	at Texas A&M
Sept. 19	vs. Kansas #
Oct. 3	Baylor
Oct. 10	Hawai'i
Oct. 17	at Texas Tech
Oct. 24	Kansas State
Oct. 31	at BYU
Nov. 7	Colorado
Nov. 14	at UCF
Nov. 21	Oklahoma State
Nov. 28	at Arizona

#London, England

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Jake Fette, QB	★★★★
2.	Cardae Mack, RB	★★★★
3.	Hayden Vercher, TE	★★★★
4.	Landen Anderson, DL	★★★
5.	Julian Hugo, EDGE	★★★
6.	Jarmaine Mitchell, OT	★★★
7.	Davis Kinney, S	★★★
8.	Cortavius Tisaby, OT	★★★
9.	Landen Miree, TE	★★★
10.	Zeth Thues, S	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Kenny Dillingham • Record at School: 22-17 (3 years)
Career Record: 22-17 (3 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Marcus Arroyo
Defensive Coordinator: Brian Ward • Location: Tempe, Ariz.
Stadium: Mountain America Stadium (53,599)

BAYLOR BEARS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 62 | BIG 12 PREDICTION: 12 | 2025 RECORD: 5-7, 3-6 BIG 12

OFFENSE Quarterback DJ Lagway holds the keys to the Baylor offense this season. The former 5-star prospect comes to Baylor — where his dad was a running back 25 years ago — after two up-and-down years at Florida. "Every day I wake up, it's a blessing, because I'm living six-year-old me's dream," Lagway says.

Lagway is one of many new faces expected to fill a lot of holes on offense, as the Bears replace their top four receivers, tight end, running back, quarterback and four of five starters on the offensive line.

After redshirting last season, wide receiver Louis Brown IV is expected to play a key role on the outside, while Jadon Porter is back for his third season in Waco and hopes to have a larger role. Dre'lon Miller did a little bit of everything at Colorado and will have a similarly large role at Baylor.

Dawson Pendergrass will lead the backfield after missing last season with a foot injury, but he has three promising underclassmen behind him.

DEFENSE After two years of calling plays on defense, head coach Dave Aranda has handed those duties to first-year defensive coordinator Joe Klanderman, who spent the past six seasons at Kansas State. Klanderman's scheme is predicated on creating havoc and getting pressure on the quarterback, something Baylor struggled with mightily last season. "One of the things we're talking about now is havoc rate," Klanderman says. "We're trying to create that by letting those defensive linemen rumble. We're more of an attacking style than we are a reacting style."

The Bears focused on adding pressure-inducing game-wreckers in the front seven, including Hosea Wheeler from Indiana, Jamaal Whyce Jr. from Marshall, Ryan Davis from Kansas State, Garrick Ponder from Southern Miss and Kedrick Walker from Georgia State.

Cornerback LeVar Thornton Jr. had a strong season last year and returns to anchor the back end, while Devin Turner, a former All-Big Ten safety at Northwestern, returns after missing last year with a torn ACL.

SPECIALISTS Palmer Williams was a finalist for the Ray Guy award after averaging 46.9 yards per punt. The Bears are replacing their starting kicker, Connor Hawkins, who was a late exit via the transfer portal, with sophomore Rhett Armstrong, who was highly rated coming out of high school and handled kickoff duties last year, although he hasn't attempted a field goal in a game. The return spots remain an open competition.

FINAL ANALYSIS This is a do-or-die season for Aranda. The school decided to bring him back for a seventh season just to keep things stable when former athletic director Mack Rhoades left in a lurch near the end of last year. There is no magic number that will save his job, but Aranda knows that the pressure is on to win, and win now.

2025 RESULTS (5-7, 3-6 BIG 12)

Aug. 29	Auburn	L	24-38
Sept. 6	at SMU (ot)	W	48-45
Sept. 13	Samford	W	42-7
Sept. 20	Arizona State	L	24-27
Sept. 27	at Oklahoma State	W	45-27
Oct. 4	Kansas State	W	35-34
Oct. 18	at TCU	L	36-42
Oct. 25	at Cincinnati	L	20-41
Nov. 1	UCF	W	30-3
Nov. 15	Utah	L	28-55
Nov. 22	at Arizona	L	17-41
Nov. 29	Houston	L	24-31

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	vs. Auburn #
Sept. 12	Prairie View A&M
Sept. 19	Louisiana Tech
Sept. 26	Colorado
Oct. 3	at Arizona State
Oct. 17	TCU
Oct. 24	at Kansas
Oct. 31	at UCF
Nov. 7	Iowa State
Nov. 14	at BYU
Nov. 21	Texas Tech
Nov. 28	at Houston

#Atlanta

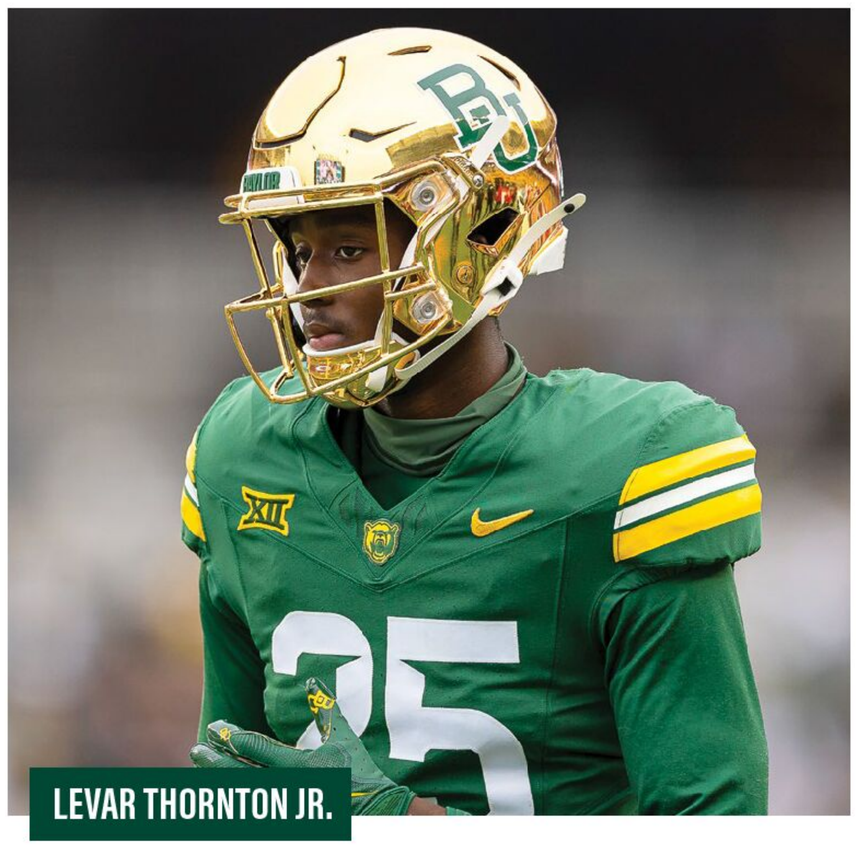
TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Ryelan Morris, RB	★★★
2.	Quinn Murphy, QB	★★★
3.	Jae'Lin Battle, DL	★★★
4.	London Smith, WR	★★★
5.	HD Davis, RB	★★★
6.	Donel Robinson Jr., IOL	★★★
7.	Davion Peters, WR	★★★
8.	Jamarion Richardson, CB	★★★
9.	Jordan Davis, S	★★★
10.	Kai Wesley, TE	★★★

*Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Dave Aranda • Record at School: 36-37 (6 years) • Career Record: 36-37 (6 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Jake Spavital • Defensive Coordinator: Joe Klanderman • Location: Waco, Texas • Stadium: McLane Stadium (45,140)



LEVAR THORNTON JR.

SCOUTING THE BEARS

"There are times on film when that defense looks phenomenal. Certain games last year, they'd look great on film, and then there were certain games when they couldn't stop the run. Against Utah, they were giving up 80-yard runs like it was a cup of water. That's gonna be their challenge. It's the consistency. Right now, they're lacking consistency. ... I think [head coach] Dave Aranda is the real deal. Scheme-wise, he's phenomenal. But he's just a little weird. Maybe a little socially awkward. But he knows football. ... Maybe he should just be calling plays the whole time. They go through a lot of coaches on defense, too. When you go through a lot of coaches on your staff, that's a sign."

— An opposing Big 12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (1)

WR	24	Louis Brown IV (Sr.)	88	Taz Williams Jr. (Fr.)
WR	11	Dre'lon Miller* (Jr.)	82	London Smith (Fr.)
WR	83	Jadon Porter (Jr.)	16	Gavin Freeman* (Sr.)
LT	77	Logan Moore* (Jr.)	75	Harrison Cluff (Fr.)
LG	70	Nate Kibble* (So.)	78	Cole Rhett* (Jr.)
C	68	Yakiri Walker* (Sr.)	66	Koltin Sieracki (So.)
RG	66	Koltin Sieracki (So.)	71	Matthew Parker (Fr.)
RT	**74**	**KADEN SIERACKI (SR.)**	72	Asher Hale* (Jr.)
TE	85	Matthew Klopfenstein (Sr.)	81	Tony Livingston* (Sr.)
QB	12	DJ Lagway* (Jr.)	14	Nate Bennett (So.)
RB	35	Dawson Pendergrass (Jr.)	22	Caden Knighten (So.)

DEFENSE (4)

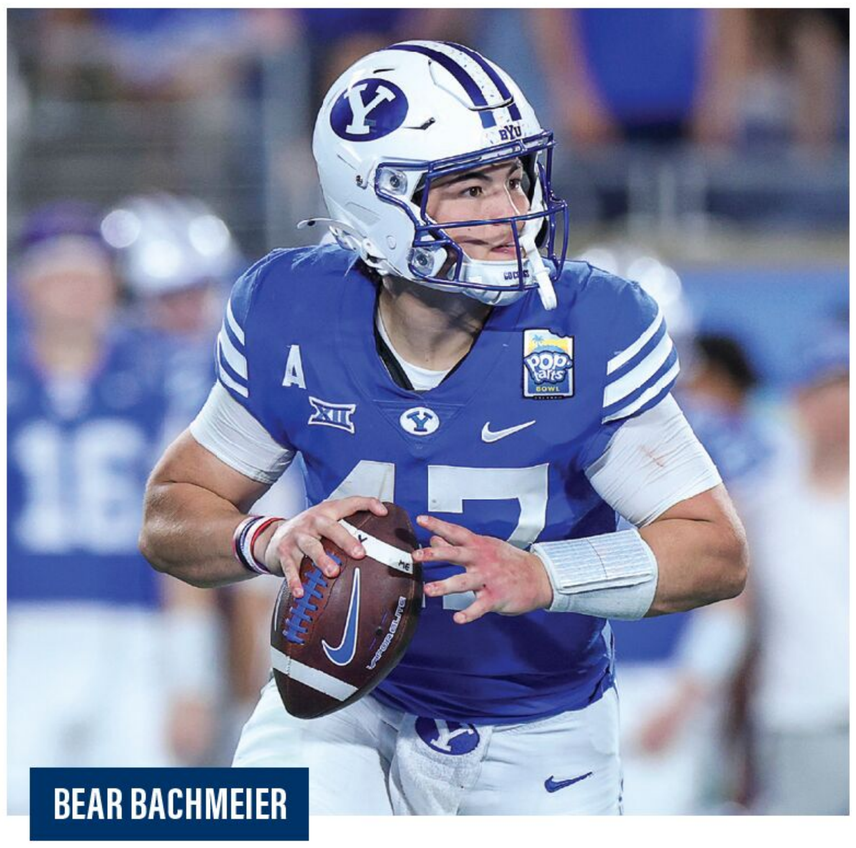
DE	99	Jamaal Whyce Jr.* (Sr.)	53	Daemian Wimberly* (Jr.)
DT	91	Hosea Wheeler* (Sr.)	98	Jackson Blackwell (Fr.)
DT	**59**	**DEVONTE TEZINO (SR.)**	97	Jordan Mack* (Sr.)
DE	40	Kyler Jordan (Sr.)	93	Zavion Hardy* (Sr.)
ILB	36	Travion Barnes (Sr.)	50	Kedrick Walker* (Sr.)
ILB	41	Kaleb Burns (So.)	**45**	**KYLAND REED (JR.)**
JACK	52	Ryan Davis* (Jr.)	51	Garrick Ponder* (Sr.)
CB	**25**	**LEVAR THORNTON JR. (JR.)**	23	Stilton McKelvey* (Jr.)
CB	18	Devon Jordan* (Jr.)	22	Reggie Bush II (Sr.)
S	13	Devin Turner (Sr.)	24	Micah Gifford (Sr.)
S	**38**	**JACOB REDDING (JR.)**	15	Colby McCalister* (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	98	Rhett Armstrong (So.)	KR	16	Gavin Freeman* (Sr.)
P	94	Palmer Williams (Sr.)	PR	16	Gavin Freeman* (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

BAYLOR SID



BEAR BACHMEIER

SCOUTING THE COUGARS

"They're the best team in our conference. They're the most physical team. They have the best coaches, and they have great energy. They play complementary football — offense, defense, special teams. At the line of scrimmage, they look totally different than any other Big 12 team. I think that program is about to skyrocket. ... This is the year that they'll get over the top. If they don't this year, I don't know that they ever will. The reason I say that is because of the influx of money they got with their roster. ... Year 2 with [QB] Bear Bachmeier, Year 4 with LJ Martin, who is one of the best backs in the country, you return a lot of guys on defense that were really productive. [Faletau Satuala] was one of the best — if not the best — safeties we played all year."

— An opposing Big 12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)				
WR	13	Jojo Phillips (Jr.)	0	Tei Nacua (So.)
WR	3	Kyler Kasper* (Jr.)	18	Reggie Frischknecht (So.)
WR	5	Cody Hagen (Jr.)	19	Tiger Bachmeier (Sr.)
LT	58	Paki Finau* (So.)	52	Bott Mulitalo (Fr.)
LG	51	Sonny Makasini (Sr.)	56	Zak Yamauchi* (So.)
C	**63**	**BRUCE MITCHELL (SR.)**	67	Trevor Pay (So.)
RG	64	Kyle Sfarcioc (Sr.)	74	Trevin Ostler (Sr.)
RT	**75**	**ANDREW GENTRY (SR.)**	62	Jr Sia* (Jr.)
TE	7	Walker Lyons* (Jr.)	2	Roger Saleapaga II* (Jr.)
QB	**47**	**BEAR BACHMEIER (SO.)**	10	Treyson Bourguet (Sr.)
RB	4	**LJ MARTIN (SR.)**	30	Sione Moa (So.)
DEFENSE (7)				
DE	**48**	**BODIE SCHOONOVER (SR.)**	45	Viliami Po'uha (Jr.)
NT	96	Justin Kirkland (Sr.)	99	Ulavai Fetuli (Fr.)
DT	**57**	**KEANU TANUVASA (SR.)**	94	Anisi Purcell (Sr.)
DE	5	Nusi Taumoepeau (So.)	13	Tausili Akana (Jr.)
OLB	4	Cade Uluave* (Sr.)	33	Maika Kaufusi (Jr.)
MLB	**54**	**SIALE ESERA (JR.)**	18	Ace Kaufusi (Jr.)
OLB	**16**	**ISAIAH GLASKER (SR.)**	31	Jake Clifton* (Jr.)
CB	**0**	**EVAN JOHNSON (SR.)**	26	Jordyn Criss (Fr.)
CB	**1**	**THERRIAN ALEXANDER III (JR.)**	15	Jayven Williams* (Sr.)
SS	**10**	**FALETAU SATUALA (JR.)**	17	Jarinn Kalama (So.)
FS	3	Raider Damuni (Sr.)	22	Tommy Prassas (So.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	97	Matthias Dunn (Sr.)	KR	5 Cody Hagen (Jr.)
P	19	Fuller Shurtz (Fr.)	PR	32 Cannon DeVries (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** · *2026 TRANSFER

NATHAN RAY SEEBECK-IMAGN IMAGES

BYU COUGARS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 16 | BIG 12 PREDICTION: 2 | 2025 RECORD: 12-2, 8-1 BIG 12

OFFENSE The Bear is back. Quarterback Bear Bachmeier flourished as a freshman in 2025 after not even arriving on campus until June. After participating in spring drills at Stanford last year, Bachmeier stunned everyone by beating out two seasoned backups and then led the Cougars to the Big 12 Championship Game, where they lost to Texas Tech for the second time in a month. Bachmeier started in all 14 games for the 12-2 Cougars, completing 65% of his passes for 3,033 yards and 15 touchdowns, with only seven interceptions. Even bigger things are expected of the Southern California native in 2026.

Another notable returnee is running back LJ Martin, the 2025 Big 12 Offensive Player of the Year. The senior ran for 1,305 yards last year and can become one of the most prolific running backs in school history — top three, at least — with another big year.

DEFENSE Utah head coach Kyle Whittingham's departure for Michigan left a dent at rival BYU as well, as three-year Cougars defensive coordinator Jay Hill followed his former coach to Ann Arbor. Hill's defense in his third season at BYU was among the Big 12's best — allowing just 332.4 yards and 19.1 points per game. Head coach Kalani Sitake decided on special teams coordinator Kelly Poppinga to fill that role, and Poppinga has a fairly full cupboard to work with.

Utah transfer Keanu Tanuvasa will be the heart of the front seven, aided by former Cal linebacker Cade Uluave, a gem from the transfer portal. Junior safety Faletau Satuala will help the new secondary coaches get settled in, but there are question marks, especially with defensive passing game guru Jernaro Gilford joining Hill and Whittingham at Michigan.

SPECIALISTS Gone are kicker Will Ferrin, punter Sam Vander Haar and long-snapper Garrison Grimes. Senior kicker Matthias Dunn has been in the program for several years and will finally get his chance to shine — at least until former five-star recruit Brody Laga returns from a church mission. When Vander Haar didn't get a waiver for another season, BYU turned to freshman Fuller Shurtz in spring camp, and the results so far have been mostly positive.

FINAL ANALYSIS BYU just missed out on the College Football Playoff each of the past two seasons, going 11-2 in 2024 and 12-2 in '25. So expectations are soaring in Provo for Sitake in his 11th season, especially after the school broke the bank to keep the coach from going to Penn State last December. BYU won't be sneaking up on anybody this year, but the Cougars should have enough firepower and enough defense to contend for another berth in the Big 12 Championship Game.

2025 RESULTS (12-2, 8-1 BIG 12)

Aug. 30	Portland State	W	69-0
Sept. 6	Stanford	W	27-3
Sept. 20	at East Carolina	W	34-13
Sept. 27	at Colorado	W	24-21
Oct. 3	West Virginia	W	38-24
Oct. 11	at Arizona (ot)	W	33-27
Oct. 18	Utah	W	24-21
Oct. 25	at Iowa State	W	41-27
Nov. 8	at Texas Tech	L	7-29
Nov. 15	TCU	W	44-13
Nov. 22	at Cincinnati	W	26-14
Nov. 29	UCF	W	41-21
Dec. 6	vs. Texas Tech #	L	7-34
Dec. 27	vs. Georgia Tech %	W	25-21

#Arlington, TX %Pop-Tarts Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	Utah Tech
Sept. 12	Arizona
Sept. 19	at Colorado State
Oct. 3	at TCU
Oct. 10	Iowa State
Oct. 17	Notre Dame
Oct. 24	at UCF
Oct. 31	Arizona State
Nov. 7	at Utah
Nov. 14	Baylor
Nov. 21	at Kansas
Nov. 28	Cincinnati

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Ryder Lyons, QB	★★★★
2.	Brock Harris, TE	★★★★
3.	Bott Mulitalo, IOL	★★★★
4.	Ty Goettsche, TE	★★★★
5.	Lopeti Moala, DL	★★★★
6.	Adam Bywater, LB	★★★★
7.	Jaron Pula, WR	★★★
8.	Jax Tanner, IOL	★★★
9.	Legend Glasker, WR	★★★
10.	Graham Livingston, WR	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Kalani Sitake · Record at School: 84-45 (10 years)
Career Record: 84-45 (10 years) · Offensive Coordinator: Aaron Roderick
Defensive Coordinator: Kelly Poppinga · Location: Provo, Utah
Stadium: LaVell Edwards Stadium (62,073)

CINCINNATI BEARCATS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 63 | BIG 12 PREDICTION: 13 | 2025 RECORD: 7-6, 5-4 BIG 12

OFFENSE Cincinnati is replacing virtually every skill player from last season, starting with quarterback Brendan Sorsby, who committed to Texas Tech via the portal as one of the highest-paid players in the country. To replace him, the Bearcats landed on Georgia Southern's JC French IV.

The wide receiver room has to be rebuilt to a large extent. Isaiah Johnson will have a big role thanks to his lightning speed. Additions like JV Gibson, Larenzo Fenner, and Cade Wolford fill out the rest of the room.

The Bearcats boast a great offensive line that returns three starters — All-American Evan Tengesdahl, Taran Tyo and sought-after left tackle Joe Cotton. Expect the offense to lean heavily on the ground game with running backs Zion Johnson, Gi'Bran Payne and Zylan Perry, and then use the play-action pass, an approach that French is familiar with.

DEFENSE First-year defensive coordinator Nate Woody is implementing a pressure-based 3-3-5 scheme, but as with the offense, the Bearcats are replacing some studs from the 2025 season. Jake Golday and Dontay Corleone will both play in the NFL, while defensive backs Christian Harrison and Jiquan Sanks both transferred after the season.

Cincinnati added support at defensive tackle in Josh Hough and Chidera Otutu, while solidifying the defensive backfield with safety Ty Goodwill and cornerback Kenny Worthy. Defensive end Marquaze Parker has been consistent since his true freshman season and projects to play a massive role as the Bearcats' best pass-rusher opposite outside linebackers Brian Simms III and Thomas Johnson. Northern Illinois transfer Filip Maciorowski will play the Golday role as a high-volume tackler capable of getting after the quarterback.

Expect the scheme and heightened investment on the defensive side of the ball to lead to much more chaos, with a big uptick in forced turnovers.

SPECIALISTS Cincinnati is returning placekicker Stephen Rusnak and punter Max Fletcher, both of whom had great first seasons as starters and should take another step forward. Isaiah Johnson makes the most sense as the kickoff and punt returner — he's the team's fastest and shiftiest player.

FINAL ANALYSIS It will be hard for Cincinnati to have a better season in 2026 than it did in 2025, simply because of all the departed talent. French should be the deciding factor. While he isn't as explosive as Sorsby, Cincinnati should have a better running game to make French's job easier. The defense played well enough last season to keep UC in games, but the turnover numbers were not where they needed to be. The new scheme should help with that in 2026.

2025 RESULTS (7-6, 5-4 BIG 12)

Aug. 28	vs. Nebraska #	L	17-20
Sept. 6	Bowling Green	W	34-20
Sept. 13	Northwestern State	W	70-0
Sept. 27	at Kansas	W	37-34
Oct. 4	Iowa State	W	38-30
Oct. 11	UCF	W	20-11
Oct. 18	at Oklahoma State	W	49-17
Oct. 25	Baylor	W	41-20
Nov. 1	at Utah	L	14-45
Nov. 15	Arizona	L	24-30
Nov. 22	BYU	L	14-26
Nov. 29	at TCU	L	23-45
Jan. 2	vs. Navy %	L	13-35

#Kansas City, MO %Liberty Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	Boston College
Sept. 12	Western Carolina
Sept. 19	Miami (Ohio) #
Sept. 26	Kansas State
Oct. 3	at Arizona
Oct. 17	at West Virginia
Oct. 24	Texas Tech
Oct. 31	Utah
Nov. 7	at Houston
Nov. 14	at Iowa State
Nov. 21	Colorado
Nov. 28	at BYU

#TQL Stadium

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Lance Dawson, DL	★★★★
2.	Jalen Williams, TE	★★★
3.	Austin Hoane, IOL	★★★
4.	Luke Collins, IOL	★★★
5.	Jaidon Windom, S	★★★
6.	Solomon Mathis, OT	★★★
7.	Markell Taylor, S	★★★
8.	Jonathan Rulo, DL	★★★
9.	Joshua Smith, ATH	★★★
10.	Jaxon Newton, LB	★★★

*Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Scott Satterfield • Record at School: 15-22 (3 years)
Career Record: 91-70 (13 years) • Offensive Coordinators: Nic Cardwell, Pete Thomas • Defensive Coordinators: Nate Woody , Cortney Braswell
Location: Cincinnati, Ohio • Stadium: Nippert Stadium (38,088)

EVAN TENGESDAHL

SCOUTING THE BEARCATS

"Losing [quarterback Brendan Sorsby] to Texas Tech is a major loss. He was the engine of that team. He made that team go with his ability to pass the ball, and he helped in the run game a lot. He was just a dynamic player for them. He wasn't an NFL quarterback in terms of throwing the football, but he was a really good athlete, and he's a winner. Losing him just shows you in this conference, not everybody is playing by the same rules with revenue sharing. It's the haves and the have-nots. ... I'm very intrigued by their defensive coordinator hire [Nate Woody]. He's got a great track record at Army, and he's had really good numbers."

— An opposing Big 12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)

WR	11	JV Gibson* (Sr.)	18	Giyahni Kontosis (Fr.)
WR	0	Isaiah Johnson (Jr.)	8	Cade Wolford* (So.)
WR	2	Larenzo Fenner* (Jr.)	9	Malachi Henry* (Jr.)
LT	74	**JOE COTTON (SR.)**	72	Nolan Latulippe (Jr.)
LG	50	**EVAN TENGESDAHL (JR.)**	59	Jake Wheelock (So.)
C	77	**TARAN TYO (SR.)**	78	Grant Edgington (Jr.)
RG	66	Xavier Lozowicki (Jr.)	73	Aiden Pastoriza (So.)
RT	71	Judea Milon (Sr.)	63	Zac Clarke (So.)
TE	87	Gavin Grover (Jr.)	82	Ka'Maurri Smith (Fr.)
QB	4	JC French IV* (Sr.)	5	Samaj Jones (So.)
RB	13	Zion Johnson (Fr.)	6	Gi'Bran Payne* (Sr.)

DEFENSE (1)

DE	4	Marquaze Parker (Jr.)	16	Jaylon White-McClain (Sr.)
DT	11	Chidera Otutu* (Jr.)	92	Elijah Gunn (Jr.)
DT	95	Josh Hough* (Sr.)	88	CD McFee (Fr.)
OLB	54	Thomas Johnson* (Sr.)	17	Brian Simms III (Jr.)
ILB	12	Filip Maciorowski* (Jr.)	9	Damaine Wilson* (So.)
ILB	22	**JONATHAN THOMPSON (SR.)**	31	Simeon Coleman (Jr.)
CB	0	Jacob Finley* (Sr.)	25	Daniel James (So.)
CB	8	Kenny Worthy* (So.)	6	Zay Johnson (So.)
NB	3	Antwan Peek Jr. (Sr.)	5	Marqavious Saboor (Jr.)
S	7	Ty Goodwill* (Jr.)	18	Jasper Beeler* (Sr.)
S	2	MJ Cannon* (Sr.)	19	CJ Jones (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	99	Stephen Rusnak (Sr.)	KR	0 Isaiah Johnson (Jr.)
P	31	Max Fletcher (Sr.)	PR	0 Isaiah Johnson (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

MATTHEW VISINSKY/ICON SPORTSWIRE VIA GETTY IMAGES

JULIAN LEWIS

COLORADO BUFFALOES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 64 | BIG 12 PREDICTION: 14 | 2025 RECORD: 3-9, 1-8 BIG 12

OFFENSE Following a dismal season on offense last year, head coach Deion Sanders hired former Sacramento State head coach Brennan Marion, the creator of the Go-Go attack, as offensive coordinator. Marion's scheme, which relies on a strong run game and vertical shots in the passing game, has been highly productive at multiple stops.

Former 5-star recruit Julian "JuJu" Lewis showed some promise in a pair of starts late last year and could be the starter at quarterback, but Utah transfer Isaac Wilson is pushing for the job. They have several intriguing weapons, including San José State transfer Danny Scudero, who led the country last season with 1,297 receiving yards.

Running backs DeKalon Taylor, Damian Henderson II and Richard Young stood out in spring, while Micah Welch led the Buffs in rushing last year. At receiver, transfers DeAndre Moore Jr., Kam Perry and Ernest Campbell and returner Joseph Williams are set to contribute. Tight end Zach Atkins could be a big part of the passing game, too.

The offensive line will have at least four new starters. CU brought in eight transfer linemen, led by former Houston center Demetrius Hunter.

DEFENSE It's been a complete overhaul this offseason, with former Virginia Tech coordinator Chris Marve now leading the defense. He'll have almost a clean slate to work with, as only five scholarship players on the entire defense are back from last year, none of whom were full-time starters.

Up front, defensive tackle Santana Hopper, who was first-team All-American Conference at Tulane, leads the way, while some former FCS stars — Toby Anene (North Dakota State), Balansama Kamara (UAlbany) and Lamont Lester Jr. (Monmouth) — spearhead the pass rush.

Linebacker Liona Lefau was a two-year starter at Texas and leads in the middle. Defensive back Boo Carter had a rocky ride at Tennessee, but he had a big spring for the Buffs, and Notre Dame transfer Cree Thomas has star potential at cornerback. Transfers Randon Fontenette (Vanderbilt) and Naeten Mitchell (New Mexico State) bring leadership at safety.

SPECIALISTS Senior punter Damon Greaves is back after a solid first year. Alejandro Mata, Sanders' placekicker the past four years including in 2022 at FCS Jackson State, has graduated. Redshirt freshman Elliot Arnold has a strong leg and is ready to take over. Carter could help as a returner.

FINAL ANALYSIS The honeymoon is most certainly over for Sanders, and Buff Nation wants wins and a bowl game. There are no big stars on hand, but it's a roster filled with enough talent to exceed expectations. The early-season schedule is difficult, but if this group comes together, it could pull off a surprise or two and build some momentum.

SCOUTING THE BUFFALOES

"They're interesting because you've got a young, hungry offensive coordinator who was a head coach [Brennan Marion], which is great experience. I love the defensive coordinator hire, Chris Marve. I really like some of their skill players that they have. They're always gonna have receivers and DBs. That's just Deion's deal. ... It's really gonna depend on if they can protect the passer and how good can [Julian Lewis] be in Year 2 while still being a young guy. You just watch them on tape last year, and they didn't do one thing to help the O-line, help the quarterback to get the ball out to the perimeter or moving the pocket. They get schemed up every week from a protection standpoint. Now, with a new coordinator, you'd hope that would change somewhat."

— An opposing Big 12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)				
WR	18	Danny Scudero* (Sr.)	3	DeAndre Moore Jr.* (Sr.)
WR	**8**	**JOSEPH WILLIAMS (JR.)**	7	Kam Perry* (Sr.)
LT	55	Bo Hughley* (Jr.)	57	Leon Bell* (Sr.)
LG	51	Chauncey Gooden (Fr.)	71	Jayvon McFadden* (Fr.)
C	58	Demetrius Hunter* (Sr.)	62	Sean Kinney* (Jr.)
RG	59	Yahya Attia (So.)	73	Jose Soto* (Jr.)
RT	54	Taj White* (Sr.)	**53**	**LARRY JOHNSON III (SR.)**
TE	**85**	**ZACH ATKINS (SR.)**	89	Fisher Clements* (Sr.)
QB	10	Julian Lewis (Fr.)	16	Isaac Wilson* (So.)
RB	20	DeKalon Taylor (Sr.)	**29**	**MICAH WELCH (JR.)**
RB	26	Damian Henderson II* (Jr.)	9	Richard Young* (Jr.)
DEFENSE (0)				
DE	53	Toby Anene* (Sr.)	45	Vili Taufatofua* (Sr.)
DT	97	Santana Hopper* (Sr.)	49	Quency Wiggins (Sr.)
DT	88	Samu Taumanupepe* (Jr.)	91	Sedrick Smith* (Jr.)
DE	96	Balansama Kamara* (Sr.)	56	Lamont Lester Jr.* (So.)
ILB	35	Tyler Martinez* (Sr.)	44	Gideon Lampron* (Sr.)
ILB	17	Liona Lefau* (Sr.)	50	Rodney Colton Jr. (Fr.)
CB	20	Cree Thomas* (Fr.)	30	Justin Eaglin* (Sr.)
CB	5	RJ Johnson (Jr.)	10	Makari Vickers (Jr.)
NB	6	Boo Carter* (Jr.)	31	Preston Ashley (Fr.)
S	4	Naeten Mitchell* (Jr.)	28	Ben Finneseth (Sr.)
S	7	Randon Fontenette* (Sr.)	9	Jaydan Hardy* (Jr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	46	Elliot Arnold (Fr.)	KR	6 Quentin Gibson (So.)
P	35	Damon Greaves (Sr.)	PR	6 Boo Carter* (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** · *2026 TRANSFER

BEN QUEEN-IMAGN IMAGES

2025 RESULTS (3-9, 1-8 BIG 12)

Aug. 29	Georgia Tech	L	20-27
Sept. 6	Delaware	W	31-7
Sept. 12	at Houston	L	20-36
Sept. 20	Wyoming	W	37-20
Sept. 27	BYU	L	21-24
Oct. 4	at TCU	L	21-35
Oct. 11	Iowa State	W	24-17
Oct. 25	at Utah	L	7-53
Nov. 1	Arizona	L	17-52
Nov. 8	at West Virginia	L	22-29
Nov. 22	Arizona State	L	17-42
Nov. 29	at Kansas State	L	14-24

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	at Georgia Tech
Sept. 12	Weber State
Sept. 19	at Northwestern
Sept. 26	at Baylor
Oct. 3	Texas Tech
Oct. 17	Utah
Oct. 24	at Oklahoma State
Oct. 31	Kansas State
Nov. 7	at Arizona State
Nov. 14	Houston
Nov. 21	at Cincinnati
Nov. 28	UCF

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Carson Crawford, LB	★★★★
2.	Alex Ward, ATH	★★★
3.	Rodney Colton Jr., LB	★★★
4.	Kaneal Sweetwyne, QB	★★★
5.	Preston Ashley, S	★★★
6.	Braylon Edwards, CB	★★★
7.	Domata Peko Jr., EDGE	★★★
8.	Christian Ward, WR	★★★
9.	Xavier Payne, OT	★★★
10.	Ben Gula, IOL	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Deion Sanders • Record at School: 16-21 (3 years) • Career Record: 43-27 (6 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Brennan Marion • Defensive Coordinator: Chris Marve • Location: Boulder, Colo. • Stadium: Folsom Field (50,183)

HOUSTON COUGARS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 19 | BIG 12 PREDICTION: 3 | 2025 RECORD: 10-3, 6-3 BIG 12

OFFENSE Quarterback Conner Weigman is coming off a career-best season (2,705 passing yards, 25 touchdowns, 700 rushing yards, 11 rushing TDs) and an MVP performance in the Texas Bowl. Weigman was healthy this offseason and will have the same offensive coordinator (Slade Nagle) in consecutive seasons for the first time. He will also mentor 5-star freshman Keisean Henderson, who should play some with an eye on 2027.

Weigman has plenty of weapons at his disposal with All-Big 12 wide receiver Amare Thomas, who had 12 touchdown catches and just missed a 1,000-yard season; running back Makhi Hughes, who amassed nearly 3,000 rushing yards in two seasons at Tulane but saw limited action at Oregon in 2025; and Patrick Overmyer, an NFL-caliber tight end transfer from UTSA who must replace Tanner Koziol, one of the nation's most productive players at the position the past two seasons.

A retooled line added three starters from the portal — left guard Shadre Hurst, center Anthony Boswell and right tackle Drew Terrill.

DEFENSE Graduation, not the transfer portal, left several big holes for second-year defensive coordinator Austin Armstrong.

The secondary is the unit's strength, with All-Big 12 cornerback Will James, free safety Kentrell Webb and strong safety Jordan Allen all starting 13 games last season. Jalen Mayo, who had four interceptions at FCS Stephen F. Austin, will slide into a corner spot, while fellow transfer Javion White (Tulane) is expected to start at nickel. True freshman Paris Melvin Jr. could see action in the secondary, at receiver and as a kick returner.

Up front, the Cougars must replace Carlos Allen, the team's leading tackler and interior force, and sacks leader Eddie Walls III. Off the edge, the Cougars return Brandon Mack II (five sacks) and Latreveon McCutchin and add Ashton Porter, a regular contributor for Oregon. The interior boasts depth, led by Khalil Laufau, Oklahoma State transfer De'Marion Thomas, Myles Parker and Travis Buhake.

Sione Fotu (12 starts) is back at middle linebacker, while Carmycah Glass and Jaden Yates (Ole Miss) will handle the weakside duties.

SPECIALISTS Houston will have a new placekicker, and Zac Yoakam is the only candidate with college experience. Evan Noel, the No. 1 kicking prospect in the class of 2025, and Jonathan Dimas will also compete. Punter Liam Dougherty is coming off a career-best 44.1-yard average.

FINAL ANALYSIS Expectations are high in head coach Willie Fritz's third season. If Weigman has another big year, and a rebuilt defense plays up to potential, the Cougars could find themselves in the Big 12 Championship Game.

CONNER WEIGMAN

SCOUTING THE COUGARS

"[Willie Fritz] is a ball coach. You win 10 games at Houston in Year 2 — that's big-time. Last year, they weren't as good up front as they're going to be this year. I thought they got one of the better guards in the portal from Tulane [Shadre Hurst]. Getting [Oregon running back transfer] Makhi Hughes will help. ... [QB] Conner Weigman is a stud. Tough, gritty, winner. Can beat you with his legs, and they'll run the hell out of him, too. He really understands how to run their offense they want to run. They've got a couple of really good receivers back. They've always been an explosive team, and that's what I expect them to be again. They lost their best DT, but their DC [Austin Armstrong] is good. They have a lot of speed everywhere."

— An opposing Big 12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)				
WR	**0**	**AMARE THOMAS (SR.)**	46	Jeffrey Strozier Jr. (Jr.)
WR	4	Trent Walker* (Sr.)	81	Jeremiah Bushnell (Fr.)
WR	**3**	**HARVEY BROUSSARD III (SR.)**	14	Muizz Tounkara* (So.)
LT	**79**	**ALVIN EBOSELE (SR.)**	72	RJ Lee (Fr.)
LG	56	Shadre Hurst* (Sr.)	70	Larry Crawford (Jr.)
C	52	Anthony Boswell* (So.)	50	Aaron Wolford (Fr.)
RG	**66**	**MCKENZIE AGNELLO (SR.)**	55	Demetris Dean II (Fr.)
RT	73	Drew Terrill* (Sr.)	57	Hayden Wright* (Fr.)
TE	9	Patrick Overmyer* (Jr.)	19	Kaleb Thomas (So.)
QB	**1**	**CONNER WEIGMAN (SR.)**	5	Keisean Henderson (Fr.)
RB	21	Makhi Hughes* (Sr.)	6	Re'Shaun Sanford II (So.)
DEFENSE (6)				
DE	9	Ashton Porter* (Jr.)	47	DK Mays (Fr.)
NT	90	De'Marion Thomas* (Jr.)	98	Myles Parker (Sr.)
DE	**18**	**KHALIL LAUFAU (SR.)**	92	Travis Buhake (Fr.)
JACK	**4**	**BRANDON MACK II (SR.)**	10	Latreveon McCutchin (Sr.)
MLB	**12**	**SIONE FOTU (SR.)**	30	Richmond Ugochukwu (So.)
WLB	24	Carmycah Glass (Jr.)	1	Jaden Yates* (Sr.)
CB	**5**	**WILL JAMES (JR.)**	3	JD Rhym (Sr.)
CB	2	Jalen Mayo* (Sr.)	37	Elijah Young (Jr.)
STAR	0	Javion White* (Jr.)	14	Paris Melvin Jr. (Fr.)
SS	**6**	**JORDAN ALLEN (JR.)**	13	C.J. Douglas (Sr.)
FS	**8**	**KENTRELL WEBB (SR.)**	33	Johnsley Barbas (Jr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	96	Zac Yoakam (Sr.)	**KR** 0	Amare Thomas (Sr.)
P	91	Liam Dougherty (Jr.)	**PR** 4	Trent Walker* (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

2025 RESULTS (10-3, 6-3 BIG 12)

Aug. 28	Stephen F. Austin	W	27-0
Sept. 6	at Rice	W	35-9
Sept. 12	Colorado	W	36-20
Sept. 26	at Oregon State (ot)	W	27-24
Oct. 4	Texas Tech	L	11-35
Oct. 11	at Oklahoma State	W	39-17
Oct. 18	Arizona	W	31-28
Oct. 25	at Arizona State	W	24-16
Nov. 1	West Virginia	L	35-45
Nov. 7	at UCF	W	30-27
Nov. 22	TCU	L	14-17
Nov. 29	at Baylor	W	31-24
Dec. 27	vs. LSU #	W	38-35

#Texas Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	Oregon State
Sept. 12	Southern
Sept. 19	at Texas Tech
Sept. 26	at Georgia Southern
Oct. 3	UCF
Oct. 10	at Kansas State
Oct. 17	Oklahoma State
Oct. 24	at Utah
Nov. 7	Cincinnati
Nov. 14	at Colorado
Nov. 21	at West Virginia
Nov. 28	Baylor

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Keisean Henderson, QB	★★★★★
2.	John Hebert, RB	★★★★
3.	Paris Melvin Jr., ATH	★★★★
4.	Jeremiah Bushnell, WR	★★★★
5.	James Henderson III, CB	★★★★
6.	Kaleb Walker, DL	★★★
7.	Rhett Gray, OT	★★★
8.	Jaivion Martin, TE	★★★
9.	Javen Holmes, S	★★★
10.	Bryson Castile, LB	★★★

*Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Willie Fritz • Record at School: 14-11 (2 years)
Career Record: 222-127 (29 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Slade Nagle
Defensive Coordinator: Austin Armstrong • Location: Houston, Texas
Stadium: TDECU Stadium (39,700)

MARK J. REBILAS-IMAGN IMAGES

DREW SURGES

NIRMALENDU MAJUMDAR/AMES TRIBUNE

SCOUTING THE CYCLONES

"They'll feel the loss of [former head coach] Matt Campbell more than the loss of [QB] Rocco Becht this year because of how many players and recruits they took [to Penn State]. You've also gotta count how many kids they lost to high school recruiting with them getting out of their NILs. Man, it is really, really hard to replace that amount of guys that late. ... [New head coach] Jimmy Rogers is a really good coach. I mean, he beat North Dakota State when he was at South Dakota State. Even when he was at Washington State last year, he didn't have a really good draw. They didn't have any money. He's a good coach, but it's just gonna take time, especially because of how late he got the job."

— An opposing Big 12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (0)

WR	9	Omari Hayes* (Jr.)	4	Carter Pabst* (So.)
WR	11	Dominic Overby (So.)	8	Evan Boyd* (Jr.)
WR	13	Cody Jackson* (Sr.)	17	Jordyn Bailey* (Jr.)
LT	79	Jake Taylor* (Jr.)	71	Gabriel Greenlee (Sr.)
LG	78	DeAndre Carter* (So.)	72	Austin Barrett (Jr.)
C	63	Braden Smith* (So.)	54	Cade Myer* (Sr.)
RG	77	Caden Maas* (Jr.)	74	Gavin Broscious* (Jr.)
RT	56	Colin Amick* (So.)	70	Gavin Proudfoot* (Sr.)
TE	18	Tyler Fortenberry* (Sr.)	85	Keaton Roskop (So.)
QB	1	Jaylen Raynor* (Sr.)	6	Zane Flores* (So.)
RB	0	Cameron Pettaway* (So.)	21	Aiden Flora (So.)

DEFENSE (0)

DE	88	Isaac Terrell* (Sr.)	55	Jace J. Gilbert (So.)
DT	0	Zaimir Hawk (Jr.)	95	Ka'Mori Moore (Fr.)
DT	99	Bryson Lamb* (Sr.)	97	Max Baloun* (Sr.)
DE	92	Caden Crawford* (Sr.)	98	Malaki Ta'ase* (Jr.)
SLB	16	Malcolm Jones* (Sr.)	11	Willie Breland III* (Jr.)
MLB	7	Sullivan Schlimgen* (So.)	8	Tristan Exline* (Sr.)
WLB	10	Carson Willich (Sr.)	31	Montreze Smith Jr.* (So.)
CB	18	David Coffey (So.)	3	Seth Johnson* (So.)
CB	1	Keyon Washington* (So.)	20	Trillion Sorrell* (Fr.)
SS	6	Drew Surges (Jr.)	4	Micah Harper* (Sr.)
FS	21	Duhron Goodman* (Sr.)	14	Damarius Russell* (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	97	Kyle Konrardy (Jr.)	KR	0	Cameron Pettaway* (So.)
P	95	Ethan Gurney (Fr.)	PR	21	Aiden Flora (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

IOWA STATE CYCLONES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 70 | BIG 12 PREDICTION: 16 | 2025 RECORD: 8-4, 5-4 BIG 12

OFFENSE Three-year starting quarterback Rocco Becht followed former head coach Matt Campbell to Penn State, leaving Arkansas State transfer Jaylen Raynor to take over. Raynor threw for 3,361 yards and 19 touchdowns in 2025 and brings experience to a new system led by a former Campbell staffer — offensive coordinator Tyler Roehl, who returns to Ames after a stint with the Detroit Lions. Roehl's scheme is expected to lean more on downhill rushing and play-action passing.

The skill positions feature a mix of returnees and intriguing additions. Aiden Flora is back at running back and will get help from Bowling Green transfer Cameron Pettaway, the 2025 MAC Freshman of the Year. At receiver, Dominic Overby returns, while Tulane transfer Omari Hayes and FCS Tarleton State's Cody Jackson add needed explosiveness.

The offensive line will be almost entirely rebuilt. Oklahoma transfer Jake Taylor, Montana's Colin Amick and Tarleton State's Braden Smith — an FCS All-American as a redshirt freshman — headline a group that must come together quickly for this offense to fully click.

DEFENSE Iowa State suffered a crippling injury in the spring when Toledo transfer safety Braden Awls went down with a torn ACL. The only good news is that the staff will have all summer to develop talent to replace him.

Despite heavy turnover, Iowa State retained several key contributors, including defensive linemen Zaimir Hawk and Jace J. Gilbert, linebacker Carson Willich and defensive backs David Coffey and Drew Surges.

New head coach Jimmy Rogers and defensive coordinator Jesse Bobbit also brought familiarity with them from Washington State. Linebacker Sullivan Schlimgen, defensive linemen Max Baloun, Isaac Terrell (7.0 sacks in 2025) and Malaki Ta'ase, along with defensive backs Duhron Goodman and Trillion Sorrell, should play significant roles in the rotation.

SPECIALISTS Junior placekicker Kyle Konrardy is one of the best in the country and gives Iowa State a reliable scoring option. Pettaway, who led the nation with a 33.0-yard kickoff return average, adds explosiveness to the return game, while Flora averaged 26.1 yards per punt return with a touchdown. Australian Ethan Gurney will compete for the punting job.

FINAL ANALYSIS More than 50 Cyclones entered the transfer portal, including 16 starters and a staggering total of 24 players who followed Campbell to Happy Valley. Rogers wasted no time reshaping the roster. More than 45 transfers arrived in Ames, giving the Cyclones one of the most transformed teams in the country. With that level of turnover, 2026 represents a full reset, but there's enough incoming talent to remain competitive in the always-changing Big 12.

2025 RESULTS (8-4, 5-4 BIG 12)

Aug. 23	vs. Kansas State #	W	24-21
Aug. 30	South Dakota	W	55-7
Sept. 6	Iowa	W	16-13
Sept. 13	at Arkansas State	W	24-16
Sept. 27	Arizona	W	39-14
Oct. 4	at Cincinnati	L	30-38
Oct. 11	at Colorado	L	17-24
Oct. 25	BYU	L	27-41
Nov. 1	Arizona State	L	19-24
Nov. 8	at TCU	W	20-17
Nov. 22	Kansas	W	38-14
Nov. 29	at Oklahoma State	W	20-13

#Dublin, Ireland

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	Southeast Missouri
Sept. 12	at Iowa
Sept. 19	Bowling Green
Sept. 26	Utah
Oct. 3	West Virginia
Oct. 10	at BYU
Oct. 24	at Arizona
Oct. 31	Oklahoma State
Nov. 7	at Baylor
Nov. 14	Cincinnati
Nov. 21	at UCF
Nov. 28	Kansas State

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Benji Makelela, OT	★★★★
2.	Bradley Esser, LB	★★★★
3.	Jeffrey Roberts, WR	★★★★
4.	Malcolm Watkins, WR	★★★
5.	Jamal Polite Jr., WR	★★★
6.	Tayten Duncan, S	★★★
7.	Brady Hummel, ATH	★★★
8.	Hudson Kurland, QB	★★★
9.	Daniel Howard, DL	★★★
10.	Gabriel Wilson, RB	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Jimmy Rogers • Record at School: First Season • Career Record: 33-9 (3 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Tyler Roehl • Defensive Coordinator: Jesse Bobbit • Location: Ames, Iowa • Stadium: Jack Trice Stadium (61,500)

KANSAS JAYHAWKS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 52 | BIG 12 PREDICTION: 11 | 2025 RECORD: 5-7, 3-6 BIG 12

OFFENSE Andy Kotelnicki is back as Kansas' play-caller, but he must replace prolific quarterback Jalon Daniels. Kansas will turn to Cole Ballard, Daniels' backup in recent years, or dual-threat sophomore Isaiah Marshall. The new QB will share a backfield with Dylan Edwards, a former top-150 recruit and Kansas native who joins his third program after stops at Colorado and Kansas State. "Andy's really going to enjoy finding different ways to be creative with him," head coach Lance Leipold says of Edwards.

Kansas has depth at running back with transfers Yasin Willis and Jalen Dupree. Cam Pickett, who tied for the team receptions lead last fall with 45, headlines the wide receiver group along with transfers Nik McMillan and Nahzae Cox. Sophomore tight end Carson Bruhn returns and will team with Old Dominion transfer Jailen Butler.

The O-line returns established starters at left tackle (Calvin Clements) and left guard (Amir Herring) and welcomes a transfer group that includes tackle Nick Morrow (Cal) and Kasen Carpenter (Oklahoma State).

DEFENSE Kansas will try to upgrade a unit that struggled against the run and didn't generate enough takeaways in 2025. Leipold likes the depth at defensive end with top pass-rusher Leroy Harris III, Alex Bray and Dakyus Brinkley joining Michigan State transfer David Santiago. Blake Herold, who had five tackles for a loss in 2025, leads the defensive tackles.

The defense has a centerpiece in linebacker Trey Lathan, who had a team-high 86 tackles, seven for a loss, an interception, a forced fumble and two fumble recoveries. Leipold expects transfers Bam Crouch (Boston College) and Jibreel Al-Amin (Marshall) to help on the outside.

In the secondary, Austin Alexander, Jalen Todd, Taylor Davis and Syeed Gibbs return, and Kansas added several transfers, including Corey Gordon (Louisville), Roman Pearson (Ball State), Khijohnn Cummings-Coleman (Iowa State) and Jaden Harris (Georgia). "The depth is going to give us opportunities to play more guys and be a fresher defense," Leipold says.

SPECIALISTS Edwards' arrival and the return of wide receiver Tate Nagy give Kansas intriguing options in the return game. The team added placekicker Martin Connington from Michigan State, who connected on 12-of-16 field-goal attempts last year, and Australian punter Matthew Gill.

FINAL ANALYSIS Kansas has some urgency in Leipold's sixth season. Kotelnicki's management of the quarterback candidates, Edwards and a potentially deeper offensive line will be key, and Kansas also could have greater depth at all three levels on defense. An opening stretch that features Missouri at home and Arizona State in London could shape the season.

2025 RESULTS (5-7, 3-6 BIG 12)

Aug. 23	Fresno State	W	31-7
Aug. 29	Wagner	W	46-7
Sept. 6	at Missouri	L	31-42
Sept. 20	West Virginia	W	41-10
Sept. 27	Cincinnati	L	34-37
Oct. 4	at UCF	W	27-20
Oct. 11	at Texas Tech	L	17-42
Oct. 25	Kansas State	L	17-42
Nov. 1	Oklahoma State	W	38-21
Nov. 8	at Arizona	L	20-24
Nov. 22	at Iowa State	L	14-38
Nov. 28	Utah	L	21-31

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 4	Long Island
Sept. 12	Missouri
Sept. 19	vs. Arizona State #
Oct. 3	Middle Tennessee
Oct. 10	at Utah
Oct. 17	at Kansas State
Oct. 24	Baylor
Oct. 31	at TCU
Nov. 7	UCF
Nov. 14	at West Virginia
Nov. 21	BYU
Nov. 28	at Oklahoma State

#London, England

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Kaden Snyder, IOL	★★★★
2.	Kory Amachree, RB	★★★
3.	Draeden Punt, EDGE	★★★
4.	Nakwaine Carter, DL	★★★
5.	Kevin Sullivan, TE	★★★
6.	Hunter Higgins, EDGE	★★★
7.	Jack Utz, TE	★★★
8.	Nate Sims, WR	★★★
9.	Tyren Parker, WR	★★★
10.	Josh Galbreath, LB	★★★

*Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Lance Leipold • Record at School: 27-35 (5 years) • Career Record: 173-74 (19 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Andy Kotelnicki • Defensive Coordinator: D.K. McDonald • Location: Lawrence, Kan. • Stadium: David Booth Kansas Memorial Stadium (52,530)

LEROY HARRIS III

SCOUTING THE JAYHAWKS

"They're intriguing. You're no longer the old Kansas, obviously, and now every week, people know that you're not the old Kansas, and you still get everyone's best. They have money in the program now. [Head coach] Lance Leipold has some juice. I know that they lost a safety in the portal, and I don't know what to make of their quarterback situation, but Leipold brought back his old offensive coordinator [Andy Kotelnicki] from Penn State. That's gonna be good because they also kept their quarterbacks coach [Jim Zebrowski]. When Leipold has had the most success, it's been when he's paired with Kotelnicki."

— An opposing Big 12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (2)

WR	7	Cam Pickett (Sr.)	11	Tate Nagy (So.)
WR	5	Nik McMillan* (Sr.)	3	Keaton Kubecka (Jr.)
WR	0	Nahzae Cox* (Sr.)	84	Jaden Nickens (Fr.)
LT	75	**CALVIN CLEMENTS (JR.)**	78	Brandon Solis* (Jr.)
LG	56	**AMIR HERRING (JR.)**	54	Tavake Tuikolovatu (Jr.)
C	51	Kasen Carpenter* (Jr.)	73	Anderson Kopp (Fr.)
RG	79	Connor Stroh* (Jr.)	72	DeAndre Harper (So.)
RT	52	Nick Morrow* (Jr.)	74	Jack Tanner (So.)
TE	44	Carson Bruhn (So.)	9	Jailen Butler* (Sr.)
QB	15	Cole Ballard (Jr.)	8	Isaiah Marshall (So.)
RB	1	Dylan Edwards* (Jr.)	6	Yasin Willis* (Jr.)

DEFENSE (4)

DE	33	Leroy Harris III (Jr.)	44	David Santiago* (Jr.)
DT	94	Blake Herold (Jr.)	56	Marcus Calvin (Jr.)
DT	95	Tre'von McAlpine* (Sr.)	99	Eamon Smalls* (Jr.)
DE	91	Alex Bray (Sr.)	9	Dakyus Brinkley (So.)
LB	7	Bam Crouch* (Sr.)	25	Jibreel Al-Amin* (Sr.)
LB	4	**TREY LATHAN (SR.)**	13	Quincy Davis* (Jr.)
CB	0	**AUSTIN ALEXANDER (SO.)**	6	Jahlil Hurley (Jr.)
CB	1	**JALEN TODD (JR.)**	5	Roman Pearson* (Sr.)
NB	2	Syeed Gibbs (Sr.)	22	Khijohnn Cummings-Coleman* (So.)
S	3	Corey Gordon* (Sr.)	20	Christian Pritchett* (Jr.)
S	27	**TAYLOR DAVIS (JR.)**	12	Jaden Harris* (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	29	Martin Connington* (So.)	KR	1	Dylan Edwards* (Jr.)
P	99	Matthew Gill (Fr.)	PR	11	Tate Nagy (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • 2026 TRANSFER

MARK J. REBILAS-IMAGN IMAGES

AVERY JOHNSON

ROB GRAY-IMAGN IMAGES

KANSAS STATE WILDCATS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 31 | BIG 12 PREDICTION: 5 | 2025 RECORD: 6-6, 5-4 BIG 12

OFFENSE Avery Johnson, the single-season leader and career co-leader for touchdown passes at Kansas State, is back for his senior season at quarterback. Once he got more usage in the running game last season, the offense performed measurably better. But 2025 was still an underwhelming year for him, likely the product of working with his third offensive coordinator in three years and missing key offensive weapons through most of the season. Reuniting with new head coach and former K-State offensive coordinator Collin Klein should provide a big boost to his game.

Joe Jackson started slowly at running back last season, but he came on strong, rushing for a school-record 293 yards against Utah. Rodney Fields Jr. transferred from Oklahoma State to make a reliable top two.

Jaron Tibbs was a surprisingly strong WR2 in 2025 and now takes over the top spot. Upside transfers like Josh Manning and Izaiah Williams will play significant roles as well. Former 5-star recruit Linkon Cure could be the X-factor with his involvement either as a tight end or spread out wide.

The offensive line will be the key in 2026 after the Wildcats lost most of their starters and were forced to turn to the portal for reinforcements.

DEFENSE K-State had to focus its portal attention on virtually every position after losing nearly all of its defensive starters from 2025. The defensive end and safety spots got the most attention, including the addition of Wendell Gregory from Oklahoma State, the sixth-ranked edge defender in the portal. His performance, along with that of prolific pressure-applier Elijah Hill, will be one of two critically important positions that must excel for the defense to have a strong season. The other is at corner, where the Wildcats will return Zashon Rich and Donovan McIntosh.

The Wildcats have seemingly addressed the pass rush and pass defense, so stopping the run will be the biggest question mark for the new-look defense.

SPECIALISTS Special teams have taken a big step back over the last few seasons at K-State. Bryce Noernberg's burst as a kick returner is a good foundation, but he had some turnover problems in 2025. Placekicking shouldn't be an issue, but winning field position with punting will be the biggest factor on special teams. In each of the past three seasons, K-State has finished in the bottom half of the Big 12 in net punting.

FINAL ANALYSIS Klein, a Heisman Trophy-contending quarterback for the Wildcats during his playing days, returns to Manhattan as the favorite son, but fans should be patient. The offense should be Big 12-caliber, but crucial holes in the defense may prevent K-State from competing for a league title in Klein's first season.

SCOUTING THE WILDCATS

"I'm interested to see if [new head coach] Collin Klein takes the old Kansas State approach where it's 12 personnel, two-tight end offense, or kind of what he did at Texas A&M, which is get the ball out in space in 11 personnel. They lost a lot of players in the portal. So with the guys that he signed, what does he want to run? Is it gonna be run the ball, run the ball, power run, use the tight ends, play-action pass? Or is it more 11 personnel, gun-run, get the ball in space? We'll find out what [Klein] really wants to focus on."

— An opposing Big 12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)				
WR	**12**	**JARON TIBBS (SR.)**	15	Derrick Salley Jr. (Jr.)
WR	5	Josh Manning* (Sr.)	17	Adonis Moise (So.)
WR	1	Izaiah Williams* (So.)	8	Brandon White* (Sr.)
LT	**78**	**JOHN PASTORE (SR.)**	59	George Fitzpatrick (Sr.)
LG	77	Tanner Morley* (Jr.)	79	Charlie Adams* (Jr.)
C	57	Delvin Morris* (Jr.)	55	Kyle Rakers (So.)
RG	71	Dylan Villarouel (Fr.)	54	Keiton Jones* (Fr.)
RT	70	Gus Hawkins (So.)	73	Oliver Miller (Fr.)
TE	**86**	**GARRETT OAKLEY (SR.)**	0	Linkon Cure (So.)
QB	**2**	**AVERY JOHNSON (SR.)**	3	Blake Barnett (So.)
RB	**4**	**JOE JACKSON (JR.)**	20	Rodney Fields Jr.* (So.)
DEFENSE (2)				
DE	1	Wendell Gregory* (So.)	30	Dalton Knapp (Fr.)
NT	15	Kamari Burns* (Jr.)	75	Holden Bass (So.)
DT	39	Travis Bates (Sr.)	88	De'Arieun Hicks* (So.)
DE	91	Jordan Allen (Jr.)	56	Elijah Hill* (So.)
LB	4	Mekhi Mason* (Sr.)	35	Gabe Powers (Sr.)
LB	28	Rex Van Wyhe (Sr.)	6	Darien Whitaker Jr. (Fr.)
CB	**25**	**ZASHON RICH (JR.)**	7	Kaleb Patterson* (Sr.)
CB	**9**	**DONOVAN MCINTOSH (JR.)**	12	Serious Stinyard (Fr.)
NB	3	Ja'Son Prevard* (Sr.)	29	Josiah Vilmael (Fr.)
S	2	Adrian Maddox* (Sr.)	0	Koy Beasley* (So.)
S	10	Logan Bartley (So.)	18	Wesley Fair (Jr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	43	Luis Rodriguez (Jr.)	**KR** 21	Bryce Noernberg (So.)
P	29	Dylan Davidson* (So.)	**PR** 6	Sterling Lockett (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** · *2026 TRANSFER

2025 RESULTS (6-6, 5-4 BIG 12)

Aug. 23	vs. Iowa State #	L	21-24
Aug. 30	North Dakota	W	38-35
Sept. 6	Army	L	21-24
Sept. 12	at Arizona	L	17-23
Sept. 27	UCF	W	34-20
Oct. 4	at Baylor	L	34-35
Oct. 11	TCU	W	41-28
Oct. 25	at Kansas	W	42-17
Nov. 1	Texas Tech	L	20-43
Nov. 15	at Oklahoma State	W	14-6
Nov. 22	at Utah	L	47-51
Nov. 29	Colorado	W	24-14

#Dublin, Ireland

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	Nicholls
Sept. 12	Washington State
Sept. 19	Tulane
Sept. 26	at Cincinnati
Oct. 10	Houston
Oct. 17	Kansas
Oct. 24	at Arizona State
Oct. 31	at Colorado
Nov. 7	Oklahoma State
Nov. 14	at TCU
Nov. 21	Arizona
Nov. 28	at Iowa State

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Josiah Vilmael, CB	★★★★
2.	Max Lovett, WR	★★★★
3.	Arley Morrell, TE	★★★★
4.	Keegan Collins, OT	★★★
5.	DJ Ackerson Jr., LB	★★★
6.	Nick McClellan, S	★★★
7.	Lamarcus Barber, IOL	★★★
8.	Tucker Ashford, EDGE	★★★
9.	Oliver Miller, OT	★★★
10.	Derrick Salley Jr., WR	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Collin Klein · Record at School: First Season · Career Record: First Season · Offensive Coordinator: Sean Gleeson
Defensive Coordinator: Jordan Peterson · Location: Manhattan, Kan. · Stadium: Bill Snyder Family Football Stadium (50,000)

OKLAHOMA STATE COWBOYS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 36 | BIG 12 PREDICTION: 8 | 2025 RECORD: 1-11, 0-9 BIG 12

OFFENSE The core of the Oklahoma State offense followed new head coach Eric Morris from North Texas. Quarterback Drew Mestemaker led the nation in passing yards for the Mean Green last year at 4,379 yards and will try to replicate that production with the Cowboys.

Running back Caleb Hawkins set the FBS record for touchdowns by a freshman with 29 at North Texas last season, to go with 1,434 rushing yards. Another North Texas transfer, receiver Wyatt Young, was Mestemaker's favorite target, finishing with 1,264 receiving yards last season. Transfers Justin Bowick from Illinois and Chris Barnes from Wake Forest arrive with high expectations of fitting well into a pass-happy offense.

While the offensive line has some veterans, their development and chemistry will be critical. Incoming transfers like Jacob Sexton from Oklahoma, Tyler Mercer from Kansas, Joseph Hanson from Coastal Carolina and a trio of players from North Texas will be among those tasked with protecting Mestemaker.

DEFENSE Less is known about the direction the defense will take under Skyler Cassity, who at 32 is one of the youngest defensive coordinators in the nation. In his one season at North Texas, he trimmed the Mean Green's points allowed per game by nearly 10 from the previous year.

Cassity uses multiple fronts and often likes to put five defensive backs on the field. His front will feature a talented group of edge rushers, including Jaleel Johnson and James Williams, as well as proven, productive linebackers like Ethan Wesloski, Tate Romney and Isaiah Chisom.

The secondary has a blend of veterans like cornerback Mo Horn and safety Quinton Hammonds, and emerging young players such as cornerback LaDainian Fields and true freshman safety Braeden Presley.

SPECIALISTS Morris brought in an entirely new group of specialists, beginning with placekicker Sam Keltner from SMU, who will be asked to increase his consistency after going 14-of-20 on field goals as a redshirt freshman last season. Australian punter Lachie Pozzobon showed a knack for accuracy and hangtime while averaging 41.8 yards per punt as a freshman at FCS Stephen F. Austin. Barnes will be the biggest threat in the return game, where he posted some highlight-reel plays at Wake Forest.

FINAL ANALYSIS Morris' track record for offensive success was a big reason for his hiring, and the offense will be expected to produce from the start. Morris brought in 18 players from North Texas, so there could be growing pains, but this is Morris' third stop as a head coach, so he understands the challenges of building a program. The Cowboys went winless in Big 12 play the past two seasons, so the bar for improvement remains low.

2025 RESULTS (1-11, 0-9 BIG 12)

Aug. 28	Tennessee-Martin	W	27-7
Sept. 6	at Oregon	L	3-69
Sept. 19	Tulsa	L	12-19
Sept. 27	Baylor	L	27-45
Oct. 4	at Arizona	L	13-41
Oct. 11	Houston	L	17-39
Oct. 18	Cincinnati	L	17-49
Oct. 25	at Texas Tech	L	0-42
Nov. 1	at Kansas	L	21-38
Nov. 15	Kansas State	L	6-14
Nov. 22	at UCF	L	14-17
Nov. 29	Iowa State	L	13-20

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	at Tulsa
Sept. 12	Oregon
Sept. 19	Murray State
Sept. 26	at West Virginia
Oct. 10	UCF
Oct. 17	at Houston
Oct. 24	Colorado
Oct. 31	at Iowa State
Nov. 7	at Kansas State
Nov. 14	Texas Tech
Nov. 21	at Arizona State
Nov. 28	Kansas

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	KD Jones, RB	★★★
2.	Braeden Presley, S	★★★
3.	Landon Bland, EDGE	★★★
4.	Luke Tepas, QB	★★★
5.	Eli Holbrook, IOL	★★★
6.	Janí Weir, WR	★★★
7.	Kole Seaton, OT	★★★
8.	Jabarie Thornton, WR	★★★
9.	Broderick Vehrs, QB	★★★
10.	Joey Quinn, EDGE	★★★

*Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Eric Morris • Record at School: First Season • Career Record: 46-34 (7 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Sean Brophy • Defensive Coordinator: Skyler Cassity • Location: Stillwater, Okla. • Stadium: Boone Pickens Stadium (53,885)

LaDAINIAN FIELDS

COLE_GUELDENZOPH/OSU ATHLETICS

SCOUTING THE COWBOYS

"Yes, [the North Texas offense] can translate to the Big 12 because of the trigger man. [North Texas transfer] Drew Mestemaker is special. He's got great vision, and he's a quick processor. They'll have a chance because he's playing quarterback. Now I know that they brought a lot of players in. I get that, but having that elite quarterback, they'll have a chance. What that means, I don't know. But they'll definitely have a chance on offense. ... [Head coach] Eric Morris has all the right pieces, and he brought pretty much his entire staff from North Texas. I expect them to pick up right where he left off, and he has a background in this conference as well that holds weight."

— An opposing Big 12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (0)					
WR	0	Justin Bowick* (Sr.)	11	Rodney Harris II* (Sr.)
WR	10	Wyatt Young* (Jr.)	1	Miles Coleman* (Jr.)
WR	2	Chris Barnes* (So.)	84	Matrail Lopez (Fr.)
LT	67	Braydon Nelson* (Jr.)	76	Desmond Magiya* (Jr.)
LG	79	Jacob Sexton* (Sr.)	66	Louie Canepa (Sr.)
C	56	Tyler Mercer* (So.)	75	Jakobe Sanders (Jr.)
RG	54	Johnny Dickson III* (Sr.)	71	Miguel Chavez (Fr.)
RT	68	Joseph Hanson* (Sr.)	77	Ashton Lepo* (Sr.)
TE	81	Donovan Green* (Sr.)	23	Oscar Hammond (Sr.)
QB	17	Drew Mestemaker* (So.)	9	Grant Jordan* (Sr.)
RB	24	Caleb Hawkins* (So.)	6	Tre Page III* (So.)
DEFENSE (1)					
DE	95	Jaleel Johnson (Sr.)	87	DeSean Brown (Sr.)
DT	5	Saadiq Clements* (Jr.)	45	Enai White* (Sr.)
DT	92	Jerry Lawson* (Sr.)	98	Luke Webb (So.)
DE	8	James Williams* (Sr.)	11	Keviyan Huddleston* (Jr.)
LB	32	Ethan Wesloski* (Sr.)	2	Isaiah Chisom* (Jr.)
LB	3	Tate Romney* (Sr.)	30	Trip White (Sr.)
CB	4	Mo Horn* (Sr.)	22	Kobe Foreman (So.)
CB	**9**	**LADAINIAN FIELDS (SO.)**	25	Kollin Lewis* (Jr.)
S	7	Quinton Hammonds* (Jr.)	23	Braeden Presley (Fr.)
S	1	Evan Jackson* (Sr.)	6	Christian Bodnar* (Jr.)
S	27	Vincent Holmes* (Jr.)	12	Cameron Epps (Sr.)
SPECIALISTS					
K	16	Sam Keltner* (So.)	KR	2	Chris Barnes* (So.)
P	37	Lachie Pozzobon* (So.)	PR	2	Chris Barnes* (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

JAMEL JOHNSON

JACOB REINER-IMAGN IMAGES

SCOUTING THE HORNED FROGS

"I still think they have good athletes. They can get the ball in space, and they have great team speed, so that's still gonna be a challenge. But I think the biggest challenge is gonna be when they can play complementary football; they're always on defense. They need to develop some consistency with what they want to do. Can they get to a power-run game to slow down the game? Can they help the defense out when they're tired and they're not having success that game? ... But they have great talent. Great speed. Great running backs. And they have a great offensive system. They can get the ball in space and to their playmakers, and they do a really good job of creating mismatches for the defensive coaches and players."

— An opposing Big 12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)

WR	7	**JORDAN DWYER (SR.)**	0	Dozie Ezukanma (So.)
WR	15	Terry Shelton (Fr.)	6	Jeremy Scott* (So.)
WR	18	Ed Small (So.)	3	Major Everhart (Sr.)
LT	56	**BEN TAYLOR-WHITFIELD (SR.)**	50	Witten Van Hoy (So.)
LG	60	**CADE BENNETT (SR.)**	73	Kilian Registe (Fr.)
C	59	Jaheim Buchanon* (Jr.)	77	Cooper Powers (Jr.)
RG	58	Noah McKinney* (Sr.)	51	Devan Robison (Fr.)
RT	70	**RYAN HUGHES (SO.)**	66	Wesley Harvey (So.)
TE	88	Ka'Morreun Pimpton (Jr.)	87	Mason Peterson (So.)
QB	1	Jaden Craig* (Sr.)	11	Adam Schobel (Fr.)
RB	26	Jeremy Payne (Jr.)	2	Jon Denman (So.)

DEFENSE (5)

DE	97	Paul Oyewale (Jr.)	9	Chad Woodfork (Fr.)
DT	95	**MARKIS DEAL (JR.)**	35	Tristan Johnson (So.)
DT	92	**ANSEL DIN-MBUH (SR.)**	34	Perry Cole Jr. (Jr.)
STUD	0	**ZACH CHAPMAN (JR.)**	33	Koron Hayward* (Jr.)
ILB	3	Max Carroll (Jr.)	44	Sam Haley (Fr.)
ILB	27	Michael Teason (Jr.)	11	Michael Short* (Sr.)
CB	1	**VERNON GLOVER JR. (JR.)**	12	Kalen Carroll* (Sr.)
CB	4	Gil Jackson (So.)	21	Teon Parks* (Sr.)
NB	7	Julius Simms (So.)	6	Kylin Jackson (Jr.)
S	2	**JAMEL JOHNSON (SR.)**	18	Kaden McFadden (Jr.)
S	22	Jordan Lester (Jr.)	10	Jacob Fields* (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	34	Kyle Lemmermann (So.)	KR	3 Major Everhart (Sr.)
P	48	John Hoyet Chance* (So.)	PR	7 Jordan Dwyer (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

TCU HORNED FROGS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 37 | BIG 12 PREDICTION: 9 | 2025 RECORD: 9-4, 5-4 BIG 12

OFFENSE This will be a year of change, as the Horned Frogs will have a new quarterback and new offensive coordinator. TCU brought in FCS Harvard transfer quarterback Jaden Craig to replace Josh Hoover, who departed for Indiana, while new coordinator Gordon Sammis takes over for Kendal Briles. The Horned Frogs will also have to replace star wide receiver Eric McAlister, a first-team All-Big 12 selection last season.

The Frogs remain optimistic that they'll be productive in Sammis' pro-style scheme. TCU returns leading rusher Jeremy Payne, who emerged in the final stretch of the season with two 100-yard games in the final four, and second-leading receiver Jordan Dwyer, who had 730 yards and seven touchdowns last season. Young wideouts Terry Shelton and Dozie Ezukanma are expected to have bigger roles as well.

The Horned Frogs return three starters on the offensive line and also signed key transfers Noah McKinney and Jaheim Buchanon. Head coach Sonny Dykes believes this could be the deepest offensive line TCU has had during his tenure.

DEFENSE TCU will also need to replace some defensive firepower with the departure of All-Big 12 safety Bud Clark, All-Big 12 linebacker Kaleb Elarms-Orr and veteran Namdi Obiazor. The good news is that TCU retained much of its defensive line, including tackle Markis Deal and end Zach Chapman, after finishing fifth in the Big 12 in rushing defense in '25.

The biggest question mark is linebacker. TCU has one answer in Max Carroll, who will play middle linebacker in Elarms-Orr's spot, but a number of redshirt freshmen and transfers are vying for the second position. TCU also returns All-Big 12 safety Jamel Johnson, who will be the leader of a secondary hoping to improve in 2026. Johnson had 96 tackles and five interceptions last year.

Cornerback was TCU's biggest weakness last season, but improvement could be in the offing thanks to the emergence of Gil Jackson. The 6-foot-3 cornerback was one of the top performers in the spring after earning playing time as a freshman last season. Starter Vernon Glover Jr. also returns, and TCU added two transfers with Power 4 experience.

SPECIALISTS TCU returns starting kicker Kyle Lemmermann and added Louisiana Tech transfer punter John Hoyet Chance. Lemmermann dealt with injuries last season but is hoping for a bounce-back year.

FINAL ANALYSIS TCU has talent across the board, but the loss of star power on both sides could be tough to overcome. The development of Craig in Sammis' system and the emergence of another linebacker will determine the Horned Frogs' ceiling as a Big 12 contender.

2025 RESULTS (9-4, 5-4 BIG 12)

Sept. 1	at North Carolina	W	48-14
Sept. 13	Abilene Christian	W	42-21
Sept. 20	SMU	W	35-24
Sept. 26	at Arizona State	L	24-27
Oct. 4	Colorado	W	35-21
Oct. 11	at Kansas State	L	28-41
Oct. 18	Baylor	W	42-36
Oct. 25	at West Virginia	W	23-17
Nov. 8	Iowa State	L	17-20
Nov. 15	at BYU	L	13-44
Nov. 22	at Houston	W	17-14
Nov. 29	Cincinnati	W	45-23
Dec. 30	vs. USC # (ot)	W	30-27

#Alamo Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Aug. 29	vs. North Carolina #
Sept. 12	Grambling State
Sept. 19	Arkansas State
Sept. 26	at UCF
Oct. 3	BYU
Oct. 17	at Baylor
Oct. 24	West Virginia
Oct. 31	Kansas
Nov. 7	at Arizona
Nov. 14	Kansas State
Nov. 21	Utah
Nov. 28	at Texas Tech

#Dublin, Ireland

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Carter Buck, EDGE	★★★★
2.	Vincent Johnson Jr., IOL	★★★
3.	Devan Robison, IOL	★★★
4.	Ace Martin, RB	★★★
5.	Jesse Ford, EDGE	★★★
6.	Cooper Reid, WR	★★★
7.	G'Ivori Graham, RB	★★★
8.	James Scott, TE	★★★
9.	Zach Taylor, S	★★★
10.	Duncan McGhee, DL	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Sonny Dykes • Record at School: 36-17 (4 years) • Career Record: 107-80 (15+ years) • Offensive Coordinators: Gordon Sammis, A.J. Ricker • Defensive Coordinator: Andy Avalos • Location: Fort Worth, Texas • Stadium: Amon G. Carter Stadium (47,000)

TEXAS TECH RED RAIDERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 12 | BIG 12 PREDICTION: 1 | 2025 RECORD: 12-2, 8-1 BIG 12

OFFENSE With the uncertainty around star quarterback Brendan Sorsby's eligibility, Tulsa transfer Kirk Francis appears to be first in line for the job. Francis started 10 games at Tulsa and racked up 3,045 yards and 18 touchdowns in his 18 total appearances. Redshirt freshman Lloyd Jones III is a backup option who tore his ACL his senior year of high school and appeared in one game in 2025. Will Hammond, last season's backup, is recovering from his own torn ACL, though he is projected to be back sometime early in the season.

The Red Raiders have a fully stocked arsenal around the QB, whoever he is. Running backs Cameron Dickey and J'Koby Williams return following phenomenal sophomore seasons. The tandem combined for nearly 2,000 rushing yards last season and scored 25 total touchdowns.

Texas Tech returns three starters on the offensive line — tackles Howard Sampson and Jacob Ponton and center Sheridan Wilson.

Sorsby has several weapons at his disposal this season, including second-team All-Big 12 tight end Terrance Carter Jr. and Pitt transfer wide receiver Kenny Johnson.

DEFENSE Replacing several NFL Draft picks on the defensive side of the ball is the toughest task Texas Tech is facing this season.

Following in the footsteps of the nation's 2025 sack leader David Bailey are transfers Trey White and Adam Trick. Their production is enticing. White tallied 19.5 sacks the last two seasons at San Diego State, while Trick finished with 12.5 tackles for a loss last season at Miami (Ohio).

The Red Raiders recruited Kansas State linebacker Austin Romaine out of the transfer portal to pair up next to Big 12 Championship Game Most Outstanding Player Ben Roberts. The most important returner on defense, however, is cornerback Brice Pollock. He finished with five interceptions last season and was named first-team All-Big 12.

SPECIALISTS Lou Groza Award semifinalist and All-Big 12 first-teamer Stone Harrington returns for his senior season as the incumbent placekicker. Harrington won the job last season with a big leg that helped him nail a career-long 58-yard field goal against Utah. The Red Raiders must replace their punter after the graduation of starter Jack Burgess.

FINAL ANALYSIS The schedule presents intriguing measuring sticks with Houston, Arizona and Oklahoma State. It's likely that the Red Raiders will be marginally worse defensively, purely because of the personnel they're losing to the NFL. Still, even without the services of its top signal-caller, Texas Tech's roster is top-to-bottom the most talented in the Big 12.

2025 RESULTS (12-2, 8-1 BIG 12)

Aug. 30	Arkansas-Pine Bluff	W	67-7
Sept. 6	Kent State	W	62-14
Sept. 13	Oregon State	W	45-14
Sept. 20	at Utah	W	34-10
Oct. 4	at Houston	W	35-11
Oct. 11	Kansas	W	42-17
Oct. 18	at Arizona State	L	22-26
Oct. 25	Oklahoma State	W	42-0
Nov. 1	at Kansas State	W	43-20
Nov. 8	BYU	W	29-7
Nov. 15	UCF	W	48-9
Nov. 29	at West Virginia	W	49-0
Dec. 6	vs. BYU #	W	34-7
Jan. 1	vs. Oregon %	L	0-23

#Arlington, TX %Orange Bowl: CFB Playoff Quarterfinal

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	Abilene Christian
Sept. 12	at Oregon State
Sept. 19	Houston
Sept. 26	Sam Houston
Oct. 3	at Colorado
Oct. 17	Arizona State
Oct. 24	at Cincinnati
Oct. 31	Arizona
Nov. 7	West Virginia
Nov. 14	at Oklahoma State
Nov. 21	at Baylor
Nov. 28	TCU

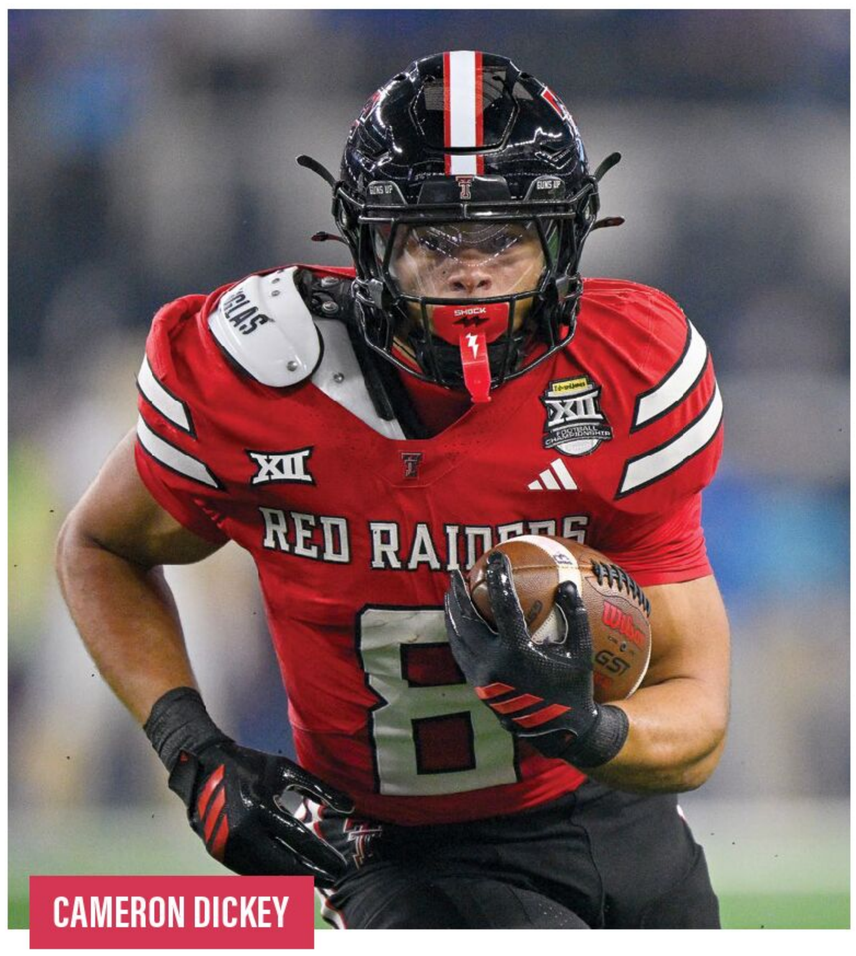
TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	LaDamion Guyton, EDGE	★★★★
2.	Chase Campbell, WR	★★★★
3.	Felix Ojo, OT	★★★★
4.	S'Vioarean Martin, CB	★★★★
5.	Matt Ludwig, TE	★★★★
6.	Bryce Gilmore, OT	★★★★
7.	Ashton Rowden, RB	★★★★
8.	Kaegan Ash, LB	★★★★
9.	Donovan Webb, S	★★★
10.	Jacob Crow, OT	★★★

*Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Joey McGuire • Record at School: 35-18 (4 years)
Career Record: 35-18 (4 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Mack Leftwich
Defensive Coordinators: Shiel Wood, Rob Greene • Location: Lubbock, Texas
Stadium: Jones AT&T Stadium (60,229)



CAMERON DICKEY

SCOUTING THE RED RAIDERS

"[Brendan Sorsby] is not gonna be able to play, no matter what they say. There's no way because once you open Pandora's Box, it's over. ... It's hard every year when you recruit the portal. Obviously, last year, they hit on all four of those D-linemen. Are they really gonna do that every year? I mean, that's hard. ... [Backup QB] Will Hammond is talented, but we all know with an ACL, it takes a long time to recover. ... I think they're still ultra-talented, so they can still [win the Big 12]. It's just not gonna be easy. To me, it was BYU vs. Texas Tech for the Big 12 championship. Can you say that now? I don't know."

— An opposing Big 12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR	4	Kenny Johnson* (Sr.)	9	Donte Lee Jr.* (Sr.)
WR	1	Micah Hudson (Jr.)	11	Malcolm Simmons* (Jr.)
WR	3	**COY EAKIN (SR.)**	6	Jalen Jones* (Jr.)
LT	79	**HOWARD SAMPSON (SR.)**	78	Ellis Davis (So.)
LG	57	Hunter Zambrano (Sr.)	65	D'Anthis Upshaw Jr. (So.)
C	72	**SHERIDAN WILSON (SR.)**	52	Cash Cleveland (Jr.)
RG	54	Jordan Church* (Jr.)	61	Connor Carty (Fr.)
RT	70	**JACOB PONTON (SO.)**	74	Daniel Sill (Jr.)
TE	7	**TERRANCE CARTER JR. (SR.)**	85	Jett Carpenter (Sr.)
QB	18	Kirk Francis* (Jr.)	10	Lloyd Jones III (Fr.)
RB	8	**CAMERON DICKEY (JR.)**	20	J'Koby Williams (Jr.)

DEFENSE (5)

DE	2	Trey White* (Sr.)	97	Charles Anderson Jr. (So.)
DT	10	**A.J. HOLMES JR. (SR.)**	1	Julien Laventure* (Sr.)
DT	98	Mateen Ibirogba* (Sr.)	92	Bryce Butler* (Sr.)
DE	20	Adam Trick* (Sr.)	33	Ansel Nedore (Jr.)
ILB	13	**BEN ROBERTS (SR.)**	9	Corey Platt Jr.* (Jr.)
ILB	15	Austin Romaine* (Sr.)	11	Brock Golwas (So.)
CB	14	**BRICE POLLOCK (SR.)**	4	Davin Martin* (Jr.)
CB	27	Amier Boyd (Sr.)	12	Tarrion Grant (So.)
STAR	6	**JOHN CURRY (JR.)**	22	Marcus Ramon-Edwards (Jr.)
S	7	**BRENDEN JORDAN (SR.)**	24	Malik Esquerra (So.)
S	3	Peyton Morgan (So.)	5	Oliver Miles III (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	48	Stone Harrington (Sr.)	KR	20 J'Koby Williams (Jr.)
P	49	Will Karoll* (Sr.)	PR	4 Kenny Johnson* (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

JEROME MIRON-IMAGN IMAGES

DUANE THOMAS JR.

SCOUTING THE KNIGHTS

"I think that once they get the quarterback situation figured out there, they're going to skyrocket. [Head coach] Scott Frost knows how to win there. Every head coach has won there except for Gus [Malzahn]. But before that, every coach has won big from George O'Leary to Frost, to [current Tennessee head coach] Josh Heupel. They've all won and had a lot of success. ... Frost has a really good offensive scheme, and there are certain players down there [in Florida] that fit his scheme. Once he gets a quarterback at the level that he wants, watch out for them. I'm high on Frost, and I'm high on that program."

— An opposing Big 12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)

WR	7	**DUANE THOMAS JR. (SR.)**	6	Ric'Darious Farmer (So.)
WR	9	Waden Charles (So.)	3	Jonathan Bibbs* (So.)
WR	13	Josh Derry* (Sr.)	2	Tyren Hornes (Fr.)
LT	73	Henry Tabansi* (Jr.)	61	Owen Spell (Sr.)
LG	66	Brady Wayburn* (Sr.)	53	LaParka Langston (Jr.)
C	54	Cooper Terpstra* (Jr.)	55	Jacob Maiava (Fr.)
RG	58	Connor Meadows (Sr.)	76	Justin Royes (Jr.)
RT	78	**PRESTON CUSHMAN (SR.)**	75	Tyler Gibson* (Sr.)
TE	0	**DYLAN WADE (SR.)**	18	Caden Piening (Fr.)
QB	14	Alonza Barnett III* (Sr.)	12	Keyone Jenkins* (Sr.)
RB	26	Duke Watson* (Jr.)	11	Landen Chambers* (Jr.)

DEFENSE (6)

DE	6	Isaiah Nixon (Jr.)	41	Bruno Dall* (Jr.)
DT	95	**RJ JACKSON JR. (SR.)**	99	Thomas Collins* (Jr.)
DT	13	Horace Lockett (Sr.)	93	Brad Gurley* (Sr.)
DE	10	Sincere Edwards (Jr.)	11	Ken Talley* (Sr.)
LB	20	**LEWIS CARTER (SR.)**	24	Tackett Curtis* (Sr.)
LB	34	Jahleel Culbreath* (Sr.)	38	Jayden Jennings (Sr.)
CB	29	**JAYDEN BELLAMY (SR.)**	5	DJ Bell (Sr.)
CB	7	**ANTIONE JACKSON (SR.)**	17	Jailen Duffie* (Jr.)
NB	4	**BRAEDEN MARSHALL (SR.)**	14	Kahmel Johnson* (So.)
S	8	**DEMARI HENDERSON (SR.)**	21	Ty Bartrum* (Sr.)
S	23	Jayden Williams (Sr.)	18	Caleb Flagg* (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	15	Will Stone* (Sr.)	KR	20	Kaj Baker (Fr.)
P	49	Atticus Bertrams* (Sr.)	PR	7	Antione Jackson (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

MICHAEL C. JOHNSON-IMAGN IMAGES

UCF KNIGHTS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 65 | BIG 12 PREDICTION: 15 | 2025 RECORD: 5-7, 2-7 BIG 12

OFFENSE After a season of quarterback uncertainty and injuries, UCF is banking on James Madison transfer Alonza Barnett III to stabilize the offense. Barnett was the 2025 Sun Belt Player of the Year after throwing for 2,806 yards, rushing for 589 and accounting for 38 total touchdowns while leading JMU to a College Football Playoff appearance. That kind of proven production is badly needed after UCF averaged just 24.3 points per game in 2025 and scored touchdowns on only 55% of its red-zone trips.

The run game also gets a major reset. Louisville transfer Duke Watson brings explosiveness after averaging 8.9 yards per carry as a freshman in 2024, while FCS Central Arkansas transfer Landen Chambers arrives after a 1,273-yard season. UCF also hopes former top recruit Taevion Swint can make an impact after redshirting in 2025.

There are solid returning pieces in the passing game. Duane Thomas Jr. led UCF with 53 catches for 528 yards; tight end Dylan Wade added 43 receptions for 523 yards and five touchdowns; and Waden Charles contributed 26 catches for 290 yards as a true freshman. FCS Monmouth transfer Josh Derry has the résumé to become the go-to target on the outside.

Up front, right tackle Preston Cushman returns, but the line will again lean heavily on portal additions, including Buffalo transfer Henry Tabansi.

DEFENSE The strength should be the secondary, which returns almost intact. Cornerback Jayden Bellamy had eight breakups and one interception, Antione Jackson added five breakups, Braeden Marshall picked off two passes, and Demari Henderson finished with 61 tackles.

Linebacker Lewis Carter headlines the front seven after leading the team with 92 tackles, while tackles RJ Jackson Jr. and Horace Lockett give UCF experience inside.

The biggest question is edge rusher. UCF posted 27 sacks in 2025, but 10 came from departed veterans Nyjalik Kelly and Malachi Lawrence. Returners Isaiah Nixon and Sincere Edwards should step into larger roles, and UCF will count on Akron transfer Bruno Dall immediately.

SPECIALISTS This is a full reset. Texas transfer Will Stone has a big leg and handled kickoffs for the Longhorns, but he has never attempted a field goal in a college game. Wisconsin transfer Atticus Bertrams brings experience at punter and should help steady the unit.

FINAL ANALYSIS This is an important season for head coach Scott Frost to start showing that his second stint at UCF can look more like his first than his tenure at Nebraska. Barnett gives UCF a proven winner at the game's most important position. If he can steady the offense, bowl eligibility should be a realistic expectation. If not, the questions about Frost's long-term future in Orlando will get louder.

2025 RESULTS (5-7, 2-7 BIG 12)

Aug. 28	Jacksonville State	W	17-10
Sept. 6	North Carolina A&T	W	68-7
Sept. 20	North Carolina	W	34-9
Sept. 27	at Kansas State	L	20-34
Oct. 4	Kansas	L	20-27
Oct. 11	at Cincinnati	L	11-20
Oct. 18	West Virginia	W	45-13
Nov. 1	at Baylor	L	3-30
Nov. 7	Houston	L	27-30
Nov. 15	at Texas Tech	L	9-48
Nov. 22	Oklahoma State	W	17-14
Nov. 29	at BYU	L	21-41

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 3	Bethune-Cookman
Sept. 12	at Pitt
Sept. 19	Georgia State
Sept. 26	TCU
Oct. 3	at Houston
Oct. 10	at Oklahoma State
Oct. 24	BYU
Oct. 31	Baylor
Nov. 7	at Kansas
Nov. 14	Arizona State
Nov. 21	Iowa State
Nov. 28	at Colorado

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Rocco Marriott, QB	★★★★
2.	Tyren Hornes, WR	★★★★
3.	Dante Carr, QB	★★★
4.	Noah Mercer, DL	★★★
5.	Alhassan Iddrissu, EDGE	★★★
6.	Elijah Keys, CB	★★★
7.	Kaj Baker, RB	★★★
8.	Preston Hall, LB	★★★
9.	Amahn Williams, IOL	★★★
10.	Amarion Queen, CB	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Scott Frost • Record at School: 24-14 (3 years) • Career Record: 40-45 (7+ years) • Offensive Coordinator: Steve Cooper • Defensive Coordinator: Alex Grinch • Location: Orlando, Fla. • Stadium: Acrisure Bounce House (44,206)

UTAH UTES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 20 | BIG 12 PREDICTION: 4 | 2025 RECORD: 11-2, 7-2 BIG 12

OFFENSE The Utes offense is transitioning from former offensive coordinator Jason Beck to veteran play-caller Kevin McGiven, who arrives from Utah State and will look to maintain a strong run game while attempting to establish a more productive passing attack. Utah welcomes an infusion of proven talent from the portal, including Braden Pegan from Utah State (60 receptions, 926 yards, five touchdowns last season) and Kyri Shoels from San José State, who will complement up-and-coming returners from last season.

Dynamic quarterbacks Devon Dampier and Byrd Ficklin, who return in a "tag-team" effort, highlight the offense, along with leading rusher Wayshawn Parker. But they'll have to get the job done behind an offensive line that replaces five starters. There's optimism that the line can still be effective, but the success of the offense will largely depend on how well that line functions this season.

DEFENSE The defense lost several key players from last season's team to graduation or the portal, but the unit was able to reload in areas of need. A big area of focus — adding more talent to the defensive line after the Utes were gashed in the run game in the latter part of the season. Utah addressed that need in the portal by adding proven players Jireh Moe (San José State) and Lucas Samsula (Wyoming), among others, and the line looks poised for improvement.

Utah added size and physicality to its defensive backs room, while the linebackers provide more versatility than in previous seasons. As a whole, Utah has a veteran defense, one that can provide a bit more versatility for new head coach Morgan Scalley and new defensive coordinator Colton Swan to stress opposing offenses.

SPECIALISTS Utah didn't need its special teams unit to do too much last year, but Dillon Curtis returns as the team's placekicker and Orion Phillips as the team's punter. The two provide consistency and experience to a part of the game that is expected to improve overall. Additionally, Mana Carvalho looks to be a game-changer in the return game with a year of experience under his belt.

FINAL ANALYSIS Utah underwent a major change when Kyle Whittingham stepped away after 21 seasons and accepted the head-coaching job at Michigan. But Scalley has been groomed for the top spot and looks to provide consistency and continuity after several years with the program. He'll have to do it with a new staff and 18 new faces on the roster in his first season, but his experience with the program should allow for a smooth transition as the Utes pursue a Big 12 title.

2025 RESULTS (11-2, 7-2 BIG 12)

Aug. 30	at UCLA	W	43-10
Sept. 6	Cal Poly	W	63-9
Sept. 13	at Wyoming	W	31-6
Sept. 20	Texas Tech	L	10-34
Sept. 27	at West Virginia	W	48-14
Oct. 11	Arizona State	W	42-10
Oct. 18	at BYU	L	21-24
Oct. 25	Colorado	W	53-7
Nov. 1	Cincinnati	W	45-14
Nov. 15	at Baylor	W	55-28
Nov. 22	Kansas State	W	51-47
Nov. 28	at Kansas	W	31-21
Dec. 31	vs. Nebraska #	W	44-22

#Las Vegas Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 3	Idaho
Sept. 12	Arkansas
Sept. 19	Utah State
Sept. 26	at Iowa State
Oct. 10	Kansas
Oct. 17	at Colorado
Oct. 24	Houston
Oct. 31	at Cincinnati
Nov. 7	BYU
Nov. 14	at Arizona
Nov. 21	at TCU
Nov. 28	West Virginia

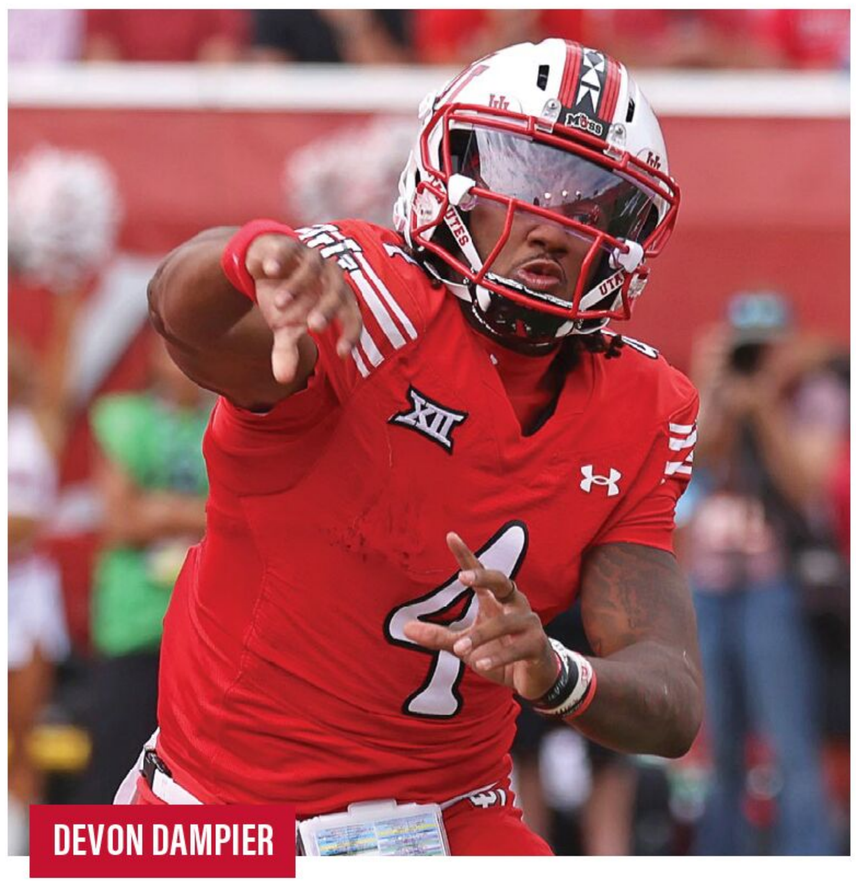
TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Kelvin Obot, OT	★★★★★
2.	LaMarcus Bell, RB	★★★
3.	PJ Takitaki, EDGE	★★★
4.	Major Hinchen, CB	★★★
5.	Kane Archer, QB	★★★
6.	Mataalii Benjamin, OT	★★★
7.	Moses Sparks, IOL	★★★
8.	Preston Pitts, LB	★★★
9.	Aisa Galea'i, S	★★★
10.	Brandon Holmes, CB	★★★

*Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Morgan Scalley • Record at School: 1-0 (1 season) • Career Record: 1-0 (1 season) • Offensive Coordinator: Kevin McGiven • Defensive Coordinator: Colton Swan • Location: Salt Lake City, Utah • Stadium: Rice-Eccles Stadium (51,444)



DEVON DAMPIER

SCOUTING THE UTES

"I'm really curious what it looks like without [former head coach] Kyle Whittingham. They cause a lot of mismatches because they're plus-one in the run game with the quarterback and all the pullers and gap schemes that they did. It's gonna be really interesting to see what their new philosophy is on offense and defense because they did struggle to stop the run last season. I think they were the worst in the Big 12 against the run last year. That's not them. They've always been great up front, so that'll be interesting. ... But yeah, it's definitely a relief that [Whittingham] is out of the Big 12 because he's a great football coach, and he's an even better person."

— An opposing Big 12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (2)

WR	7	Braden Pegan* (Jr.)	3	Nate Johnson (Sr.)
WR	12	Larry Simmons (Sr.)	6	Daidren Zipperer (Jr.)
WR	0	Kyri Shoels* (Sr.)	2	Creed Whittemore (Jr.)
LT	76	Zereoue Williams (Sr.)	72	Isaiah Garcia (So.)
LG	62	Solatoa Moea'i (Sr.)	55	Kelvin Obot (Fr.)
C	56	Isaiah Kema* (Fr.)	79	Alex Harrison (Sr.)
RG	74	Keith Olson (Sr.)	75	Roger Alderman (Jr.)
RT	73	Cedric Jefferson* (Jr.)	67	Soren Shinofield (So.)
TE	10	Hunter Andrews (So.)	89	Noah Bennee* (Sr.)
QB	**4**	**DEVON DAMPIER (SR.)**	15	Byrd Ficklin (So.)
RB	**1**	**WAYSHAWN PARKER (JR.)**	5	Daniel Bray (So.)

DEFENSE (3)

DE	15	Lance Holtzclaw (Sr.)	40	Paul Fitzgerald (Sr.)
DT	90	Jireh Moe* (So.)	45	Pupu Sepulona (So.)
DT	51	Karson Kaufusi (So.)	97	Lucas Samsula* (So.)
DE	93	Kash Dillon (So.)	8	Ethan Day* (Jr.)
LB	**7**	**JOHNATHAN HALL (SR.)**	83	Elijah Elliss (So.)
LB	0	Cyrus Polu (So.)	10	Trey Reynolds (Sr.)
CB	**9**	**ELIJAH DAVIS (SR.)**	4	JC Hart (Jr.)
CB	13	Elijah Reed* (Sr.)	19	James Chenault* (Jr.)
NB	11	Rock Caldwell (Sr.)	26	Nick Brown* (So.)
S	**23**	**JACKSON BENNEE (JR.)**	21	Nate Tilmon (So.)
S	1	Rabbit Evans (Sr.)	6	Nate Ritchie (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	17	Dillon Curtis (So.)	KR	2	Creed Whittemore (Jr.)
P	92	Orion Phillips (Jr.)	PR	8	Mana Carvalho (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

ROB GRAY-IMAGN IMAGES

SCOTTY FOX JR.

SCOUTING THE MOUNTAINEERS

"It's very similar to UCF. Once they get a triggerman, watch out for them. [Head coach] Rich Rodriguez wants to get the speed. Those offenses excel when he's got legit speed at quarterback, at running back and at receiver. I think he's solving that problem through the portal, with junior-college recruiting and with high school recruiting down in Florida. ... Once he gets the speed with the gun-run, and the quarterback plus-one in the run game, they'll have a chance. They didn't have that last year. We played them, and they didn't have any team speed. At least not what [Rodriguez] is used to having."

— An opposing Big 12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)

WR	5	Jaden Bray (Sr.)	17	Prince Strachan* (Jr.)
WR	2	DJ Epps* (Sr.)	11	TaRon Francis* (Fr.)
WR	80	John Neider* (Jr.)	14	Keon Hutchins* (Jr.)
LT	79	Carsten Casady* (Jr.)	76	Deshawn Woods* (Sr.)
LG	**52**	**NICK KRAHE (JR.)**	**67**	**LANDEN LIVINGSTON (SR.)**
C	72	Cam Griffin* (Sr.)	78	Wes King* (Sr.)
RG	54	Amare Grayson* (Jr.)	69	Devin Vass* (Jr.)
RT	65	Malik Agbo (Sr.)	74	Kevin Brown (Fr.)
TE	84	Ryan Ward (Jr.)	0	Josh Sapp* (Sr.)
QB	3	Michael Hawkins Jr.* (So.)	**15**	**SCOTTY FOX JR. (SO.)**
RB	4	Cam Cook* (Sr.)	1	Amari Latimer (Fr.)

DEFENSE (0)

DE	96	Zeke Durham-Campbell* (Sr.)	91	Darius Wiley* (So.)
DT	72	Jaylen Thomas* (Jr.)	52	Corey McIntyre Jr. (Jr.)
DL	93	Nate Gabriel (Jr.)	43	KJ Henson* (Jr.)
EDGE	50	Harper Holloman* (Jr.)	99	David Afogho* (Jr.)
LB	15	Ben Cutter (Sr.)	45	Malachi Hood* (Sr.)
LB	34	Tyler Stolsky* (Sr.)	54	Isaiah Patterson* (So.)
CB	18	Chams Diagne* (Sr.)	19	Nick Taylor (Jr.)
CB	22	Jaire Rawlison* (So.)	4	Da'Mun Allen* (Jr.)
NB	1	Geimere Latimer II* (Sr.)	14	Andrew Powdrell* (Sr.)
S	8	Kamari Wilson* (Sr.)	3	Matt Sieg (Fr.)
S	29	Kameron Reddic* (Jr.)	6	Da'Mare Williams* (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	42	Jack Cassidy* (Sr.)	KR	2 DJ Epps* (Sr.)
P	83	Bryan Hansen* (Sr.)	PR	2 DJ Epps* (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** · *2026 TRANSFER

THOMAS SHEA-IMAGN IMAGES

WEST VIRGINIA MOUNTAINEERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 50 | BIG 12 PREDICTION: 10 | 2025 RECORD: 4-8, 2-7 BIG 12

OFFENSE West Virginia returns the quarterback who finished the season last year in sophomore Scotty Fox Jr., but hand-picked Oklahoma transfer Michael Hawkins Jr. will provide competition and elevate the room. The Mountaineers were also able to land the leading rusher at the Division I level in Cam Cook from Jacksonville State, who piled up 1,659 yards and 16 touchdowns last season and will serve as a centerpiece in the run game.

The area most in need of improvement over last year is the offensive line. To that end, the Mountaineers brought back renowned position coach Rick Trickett. The line was a portal priority this offseason, adding five transfers with 91 combined starts to serve as the engine of the offense. The newcomers join returning starters Nick Krahe and Landen Livingston.

As long as the run game is more productive, the offense should be primed to take a major step forward with more consistency and a more versatile group of pass-catchers, nearly all of whom are transfers, including DJ Epps (Troy), John Neider (UConn), Prince Strachan (USC) and TaRon Francis (LSU).

DEFENSE Like his offensive colleagues, defensive coordinator Zac Alley will be adjusting to a lot of new faces across the various position rooms in his second season with the program, but there is reason for optimism given the personnel.

The Mountaineers were active in the transfer portal to address key needs as well as bringing in a talented top-20 recruiting class with several defensive standouts. The defense should be longer and more athletic while having more depth — especially on the edge and in the secondary — along with enough returning experience to yield a more productive group. Edge rusher Harper Holloman, a transfer from WKU who posted 5.5 tackles for a loss last season, could be a major disruptor, and Coastal Carolina transfer end Zeke Durham-Campbell looks to make a major impact as well.

SPECIALISTS The Mountaineers were aggressive in finding experienced specialists from the portal after losing both their punter and kicker from 2025. The coaches landed experienced punter Bryan Hansen and two kickers in Jack Cassidy and Peter Notaro who have played at the FBS level.

FINAL ANALYSIS For the second straight year, West Virginia welcomed more than 80 new players into the program, but with more time to evaluate and a bigger overall talent base, the program will be looking to take a significant step forward in Year 2 of head coach Rich Rodriguez's second stint in Morgantown. Given Rodriguez's track record, there's reason to believe that the Mountaineers should be able to do just that.

2025 RESULTS (4-8, 2-7 BIG 12)

Aug. 30	Robert Morris	W	45-3
Sept. 6	at Ohio	L	10-17
Sept. 13	Pitt (ot)	W	31-24
Sept. 20	at Kansas	L	10-41
Sept. 27	Utah	L	14-48
Oct. 3	at BYU	L	24-38
Oct. 18	at UCF	L	13-45
Oct. 25	TCU	L	17-23
Nov. 1	at Houston	W	45-35
Nov. 8	Colorado	W	29-22
Nov. 15	at Arizona State	L	23-25
Nov. 29	Texas Tech	L	0-49

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	Coastal Carolina
Sept. 12	Tennessee-Martin
Sept. 19	vs. Virginia #
Sept. 26	Oklahoma State
Oct. 3	at Iowa State
Oct. 10	Arizona
Oct. 17	Cincinnati
Oct. 24	at TCU
Nov. 7	at Texas Tech
Nov. 14	Kansas
Nov. 21	Houston
Nov. 28	at Utah

#Charlotte, NC

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Kevin Brown, IOL	★★★★
2.	Amari Latimer, RB	★★★★
3.	Vincent Smith, CB	★★★★
4.	Jyron Hughley, QB	★★★★
5.	Chris Talley, RB	★★★★
6.	Jonas Muya, OT	★★★
7.	Matt Sieg, S	★★★
8.	Makhi Boone, CB	★★★
9.	KJ Henson, DL	★★★
10.	Landon Drumm, WR	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Rich Rodriguez • Record at School: 64-34 (8 years) • Career Record: 194-137-2 (28 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Rich Rodriguez • Defensive Coordinator: Zac Alley • Location: Morgantown, W.Va. • Stadium: Mountaineer Field at Milan Puskar Stadium (60,000)

B1G BIG TEN PREVIEW

PREDICTED ORDER OF FINISH

1. OHIO STATE BUCKEYES
2. INDIANA HOOSIERS
3. OREGON DUCKS
4. MICHIGAN WOLVERINES
5. USC TROJANS
6. WASHINGTON HUSKIES
7. PENN STATE NITTANY LIONS
8. IOWA HAWKEYES
9. ILLINOIS FIGHTING ILLINI
10. NEBRASKA CORNHUSKERS
11. MINNESOTA GOLDEN GOPHERS
12. UCLA BRUINS
13. WISCONSIN BADGERS
14. NORTHWESTERN WILDCATS
15. MARYLAND TERRAPINS
16. RUTGERS SCARLET KNIGHTS
17. MICHIGAN STATE SPARTANS
18. PURDUE BOILERMAKERS

BIG TEN CHAMPIONSHIP

OHIO STATE OVER INDIANA

ALL-BIG TEN TEAM

FIRST-TEAM OFFENSE		
QB	JULIAN SAYIN	Ohio State
RB	BO JACKSON	Ohio State
RB	JORDAN MARSHALL	Michigan
AP	ANTWAN RAYMOND	Rutgers
WR	JEREMIAH SMITH	Ohio State
WR	CHARLIE BECKER	Indiana
WR	KJ DUFF	Rutgers
TE	JAMARI JOHNSON	Oregon
C	IAPANI LALOULU	Oregon
OL	CARTER SMITH	Indiana
OL	KADE PIEPER	Iowa
OL	TREVOR LAUCK	Iowa
OL	AUSTIN SIEREVELD	Ohio State

FIRST-TEAM DEFENSE		
DL	ANTHONY SMITH	Minnesota
DL	TYRIQUE TUCKER	Indiana
DL	JOHN HENRY DALEY	Michigan
DL	A'MAURI WASHINGTON	Oregon
LB	ROLIJAH HARDY	Indiana
LB	TEITUM TUIOTI	Oregon
LB	ISAIAH JONES	Indiana
LB	DANIEL WINGATE	Maryland
CB	BRANDON FINNEY JR.	Oregon
CB	JYAIRE HILL	Michigan
S	KOI PERICH	Oregon
S	AMARE FERRELL	Indiana

FIRST-TEAM SPECIALISTS		
K	NICO RADICIC	Indiana
P	BRYCE McFERSON	Maryland
KR	KOI PERICH	Oregon
PR	JACORY BARNEY JR.	Nebraska

BOWL PROJECTIONS

Rate: Illinois vs. TCU

Pinstripe: Minnesota vs. Pitt

Music City: Nebraska vs. South Carolina

Reliaquest: Penn State vs. Florida

Citrus: Michigan vs. Ole Miss

Las Vegas: Iowa vs. Arizona

Holiday: Washington vs. Clemson

College Football Playoff First Round: Indiana vs. Boise State

College Football Playoff First Round: Oregon vs. Texas Tech

Fiesta (CFP Quarterfinals): Indiana vs. Notre Dame

Cotton (CFP Quarterfinals): Oregon vs. Texas

Rose (CFP Quarterfinals): Ohio State vs. Oklahoma

Orange (CFP Semifinals): Ohio State vs. Notre Dame

National Championship: Ohio State vs. Georgia

JOIN COLLEGE FOOTBALL EXPERT STEVEN LASSAN AT ATHLONSPORTS.COM FOR A LOOK AT SECOND- AND THIRD-TEAM SELECTIONS

COORDINATOR CAROUSEL

ILLINOIS
Defense: New: Bobby Hauck
Old: Aaron Henry

INDIANA
Offense: New: Mike Shanahan, Tino Sunseri;
Old: Mike Shanahan, Chandler Whitmer

MARYLAND
Offense: New: Clint Trickett
Old: Pep Hamilton

MICHIGAN
Offense: New: Jason Beck; Old: Chip Lindsey
Defense: New: Jay Hill; Old: Wink Martindale

MICHIGAN STATE
Offense: New: Nick Sheridan
Old: Brian Lindgren
Defense: New: Joe Rossi, Max Bullough
Old: Joe Rossi

NEBRASKA
Defense: New: Rob Aurich; Old: John Butler

NORTHWESTERN
Offense: New: Chip Kelly; Old: Zach Lujan

OHIO STATE
Offense: New: Arthur Smith, Keenan Bailey
Old: Brian Hartline, Keenan Bailey

OREGON
Offense: New: Drew Mehringer
Old: Will Stein
Defense: New: Chris Hampton
Old: Tosh Lupoi, Chris Hampton

PENN STATE
Offense: New: Taylor Mouser
Old: Andy Kotelnicki
Defense: New: D'Anton Lynn
Old: Jim Knowles

PURDUE
Defense: New: Kevin Kane; Old: Mike Scherer

RUTGERS
Defense: New: Travis Johansen
Old: Robb Smith, Zach Sparber

UCLA
Offense: New: Dean Kennedy
Old: Jerry Neuheisel (interim)
Defense: New: Colin Hitschler
Old: Ikaika Malloe

USC
Defense: New: Gary Patterson
Old: D'Anton Lynn

WASHINGTON
Offense: New: Jedd Fisch
Old: Jimmie Dougherty

JEREMIAH SMITH, OHIO STATE
JOSH HOOVER, INDIANA

FROM LEFT: JEROME MIRON-IMAGN IMAGES; RICH JANZARUK/HERALD-TIMES

TOP TRANSFERS

	NAME	POS.	SCHOOL	FORMER SCHOOL
1.	**Josh Hoover**	QB	Indiana	TCU
	Hoover joins forces with QB whisperer Curt Cignetti with 31 starts to his name.			
2.	**John Henry Daley**	DL	Michigan	Utah
	A torn Achilles cut Daley's breakout season short. He'll be a force up front.			
3.	**Nick Marsh**	WR	Indiana	Michigan State
	Marsh is a top-tier talent ready to realize his potential in a reliable passing game.			
4.	**Koi Perich**	S	Oregon	Minnesota
	Perich is a versatile replacement for Dillon Thieneman and doubles as a kick returner.			
5.	**Rocco Becht**	QB	Penn State	Iowa State
	Becht's 39 starts and big-game experience will ease his transition to the Big Ten.			
6.	**Colton Joseph**	QB	Wisconsin	Old Dominion
	Joseph is one of only four returning signal-callers who ran for 1,000 yards in 2025.			
7.	**James Smith**	DL	Ohio State	Alabama
	A big-bodied disruptor among the latest group to join the Buckeyes from Bama.			
8.	**Tobi Osunsanmi**	DL	Indiana	Kansas State
	Osunsanmi's pass-rushing prowess addresses an area of need after NFL departures.			
9.	**Anthony Colandrea**	QB	Nebraska	UNLV
	The Mountain West Offensive Player of the Year is on the move again.			
10.	**Katin Houser**	QB	Illinois	East Carolina
	Back in the Big Ten on the heels of a career year as both a passer and a runner.			

RECRUITING RANKINGS BY SCHOOL

1. USC (2)	7. Indiana (20)	13. Maryland (51)
2. Ohio State (4)	8. Minnesota (23)	14. Northwestern (52)
3. Oregon (6)	9. Illinois (28)	15. Penn State (58)
4. Michigan (11)	10. Rutgers (37)	16. UCLA (64)
5. Washington (14)	11. Purdue (48)	17. Wisconsin (71)
6. Iowa (18)	12. Michigan State (49)	18. Nebraska (123)

Rankings per Rivals; National ranking in parentheses

GAMES TO WATCH

Sept. 12	Ohio State at Texas	**Oct. 31**	Ohio State at USC
Sept. 12	Oklahoma at Michigan	**Nov. 7**	Oregon at Ohio State
Sept. 26	Oregon at USC	**Nov. 14**	USC at Indiana
Oct. 17	Ohio State at Indiana	**Nov. 14**	Michigan at Oregon
Oct. 17	Penn State at Michigan	**Nov. 28**	Michigan at Ohio State
Oct. 24	Indiana at Michigan	**Nov. 28**	Washington at Oregon

TOP 10 RECRUITS

	NAME	POS.	SCHOOL	RATING	NAT. RANK
1.	Luke Wafle	EDGE	USC	★★★★★+	1
2.	Zion Elee	EDGE	Maryland	★★★★★+	6
3.	Jaimeon Winfield	DL	USC	★★★★★	11
4.	Jay Timmons	CB	Ohio State	★★★★★	12
5.	Savion Hiter	RB	Michigan	★★★★★+	13
6.	Jalen Lott	WR	Oregon	★★★★★	14
7.	Carter Meadows	EDGE	Michigan	★★★★★+	16
8.	Jerquaden Guilford	WR	Ohio State	★★★★★	17
9.	Immanuel Iheanacho	OT	Oregon	★★★★★+	21
10.	Khary Wilder	EDGE	Ohio State	★★★★★	22

Rankings per Rivals; +Consensus 5-star prospect

ILLINOIS FIGHTING ILLINI

NATIONAL FORECAST: 33 | BIG TEN PREDICTION: 9 | 2025 RECORD: 9-4, 5-4 BIG TEN

OFFENSE Head coach Bret Bielema found a replacement for three-year starting quarterback Luke Altmyer at East Carolina, where Katin Houser had two strong seasons after starting his career at Michigan State. Houser made a strong impression in the spring, winning over his new teammates with his talent and leadership.

Houser will be operating behind a mostly new offensive line. Guard Brandon Henderson is the lone returning starter. Line coach Bart Miller, who has been at Illinois since Bielema took over in Champaign, spent the spring trying to fit the pieces together. One big addition: former Wisconsin center Jake Renfro, the son of former Illinois offensive lineman Rick.

Tailback is set with the return of Aidan Laughery and Ca'Lil Valentine, who combined for 996 rushing yards and seven scores. The coaches felt good enough about the position to move Kaden Feagin to tight end, where he could have a major impact.

Hudson Clement and Collin Dixon, who caught 36 and 35 passes, respectively, in 2025, figure to be Houser's top targets.

DEFENSE When defensive coordinator Aaron Henry left for Notre Dame after the season, Bielema decided to take the unit in a totally different direction, hiring former FCS Montana head coach Bobby Hauck to install a 3-3-5 defensive scheme and show the Big Ten something new. Bielema is counting on the element of surprise to give his team a boost.

There's experience in the secondary, where safeties Matthew Bailey and Xavier Scott return. Bailey led the team with 76 tackles in 2025. Senior cornerback Juice Clarke should be an honors candidate.

Up front, Illinois is counting on veteran Pat Farrell, who learned from star pass-rusher Gabe Jacas last season. James Kreutz and Daniel Brown are the top returnees at linebacker.

SPECIALISTS David Olano won the Music City Bowl for Illinois with a late field goal against Tennessee, then got an offer he couldn't refuse and transferred to Texas A&M. Ethan Moczulski returned to Illinois after a season at Washington and will handle placekicking duties. Illinois added punter Lars Rau from Texas State.

FINAL ANALYSIS The 2024 and '25 Illinois football teams set the school record for wins in a two-year stretch with 19. What Bielema and his staff really want, though, is a spot in the College Football Playoff. The schedule includes a pair of preseason top-5 teams — Ohio State and Oregon — but every other game is winnable. Still, Illinois is one of the least-experienced teams in the country a year after being one of the most experienced. Another nine-win season is the likely best-case scenario.

2025 RESULTS (9-4, 5-4 BIG TEN)

Aug. 29	Western Illinois	W	52-3
Sept. 6	at Duke	W	45-19
Sept. 13	Western Michigan	W	38-0
Sept. 20	at Indiana	L	10-63
Sept. 27	USC	W	34-32
Oct. 4	at Purdue	W	43-27
Oct. 11	Ohio State	L	16-34
Oct. 25	at Washington	L	25-42
Nov. 1	Rutgers	W	35-13
Nov. 15	Maryland	W	24-6
Nov. 22	at Wisconsin	L	10-27
Nov. 29	Northwestern	W	20-13
Dec. 30	vs. Tennessee #	W	30-28

#Music City Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	UAB
Sept. 12	Duke
Sept. 19	Southern Illinois
Sept. 26	at Ohio State
Oct. 3	Purdue
Oct. 10	at Michigan State
Oct. 24	Oregon
Oct. 31	at Maryland
Nov. 7	Nebraska
Nov. 14	at UCLA
Nov. 21	Iowa
Nov. 28	at Northwestern

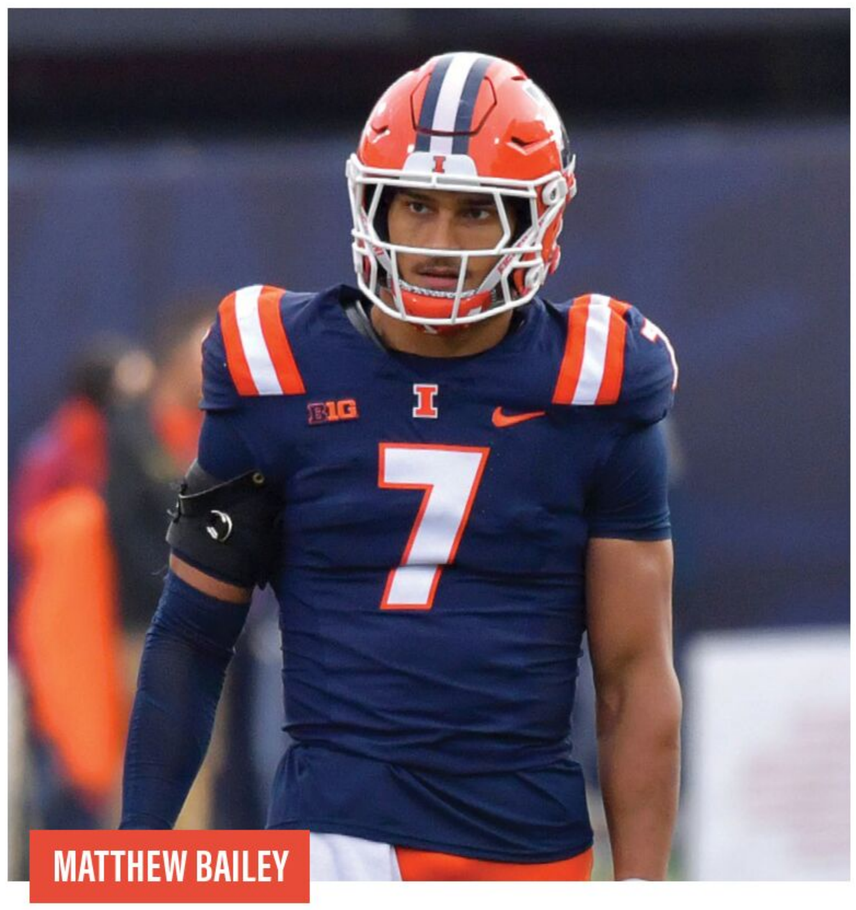
TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Nick Hankins Jr., CB	★★★★
2.	Jacob Eberhart, LB	★★★★
3.	Parker Crim, EDGE	★★★★
4.	Champ Smith, IOL	★★★
5.	Almirian Thomas, CB	★★★
6.	Kenyon Alston, WR	★★★
7.	Nas Rankin, WR	★★★
8.	Kai Pritchard, IOL	★★★
9.	Cameron Thomas, LB	★★★
10.	Jakwon Morris, CB	★★★

*Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Bret Bielema • Record at School: 37-26 (5 years)
Career Record: 134-84 (17 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Barry Lunney Jr.
Defensive Coordinator: Bobby Hauck • Location: Champaign-Urbana, Ill.
Stadium: Gies Memorial Stadium (60,670)



MATTHEW BAILEY

SCOUTING THE ILLINI

"They evaluate great. They know what fits for them. They do a great job of not swinging for a home run every time they recruit only to lose guys to Ohio State in some one-on-one battle. They have no business doing that. They're super aware of that. They don't spend a lot of useless time, and they evaluate really well. It's not surprising in any aspect that they're this good. ... Their defensive line was outrageously good the last two years. In our evaluation, it was every bit as good as Penn State's, Michigan's and Ohio State's. But I know most of that group has left, so it'll be interesting to see who they replace them with."

— An opposing Big Ten assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)

WR	13	**HUDSON CLEMENT (SR.)**	11	Brayden Trimble (Fr.)
WR	9	Alex Perry* (Sr.)	7	Nas Rankin (Fr.)
WR	17	**COLLIN DIXON (JR.)**	10	Ty Robinson* (Sr.)
LT	72	Christian Martin* (Jr.)	74	Zafir Stewart (So.)
LG	66	Brandon Hansen (Jr.)	79	TJ Taylor (Jr.)
C	59	Jake Renfro* (Sr.)	55	TJ McMillen (Jr.)
RG	75	**BRANDON HENDERSON (SR.)**	78	Eddie Tuerk (So.)
RT	71	Nathan Knapik (So.)	70	Maika Matelau (So.)
TE	3	Kaden Feagin (Sr.)	86	Christian Abney (Sr.)
QB	4	Katin Houser* (Sr.)	2	Carson Boyd (Fr.)
RB	21	Aidan Laughery (Sr.)	5	Ca'Lil Valentine (Jr.)

DEFENSE (4)

DE	52	Pat Farrell (Jr.)	96	Darrell Prater* (Sr.)
NT	43	Joe Barna (Jr.)	24	Will Holmes* (Jr.)
DE	90	Carter Janki* (Sr.)	17	Isaiah Thomison* (Jr.)
LB	10	James Kreutz (Sr.)	26	Ismael Kante (Sr.)
LB	4	Daniel Brown (Sr.)	45	Robert Edmonson* (Jr.)
LB	33	Grant Beerman (So.)	23	Jaylen Stewart (Fr.)
CB	6	**JUICE CLARKE (SR.)**	3	Nick Hankins Jr. (Fr).
CB	5	Jakwon Morris (Jr.)	22	Deuce Fillmore* (Sr.)
STAR	1	**XAVIER SCOTT (SR.)**	16	**TANNER HECKEL (JR.)**
S	0	Mac Resetich (Sr.)	14	Andre Lovett Jr. (So.)
S	7	**MATTHEW BAILEY (SR.)**	19	Jacob Eberhart (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	37	Ethan Moczulski* (Sr.)	KR	5	Ca'Lil Valentine (Jr.)
P	81	Lars Rau* (So.)	PR	1	Jayshon Platt* (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

RON JOHNSON-IMAGN IMAGES

CHARLIE BECKER

GRACE HOLLARS/INDYSTAR

SCOUTING THE HOOSIERS

"The biggest glaring thing is the production they lost in the receiver room. They've got some young guys coming in, and they paid a s— ton for [Michigan State transfer receiver] Nick Marsh, so we'll see how he does. They're just gonna be very young there. ... Defensively, they still return most of their production. But to me, it's hard to replicate what [Fernando] Mendoza did. [TCU transfer quarterback] Josh Hoover is a good player. I think he's got some turnover issues. But other than that, they reloaded. ... They're gonna lose that rush of James Madison guys that they had the last two years, so they could definitely struggle in some areas of continuity where maybe the talent does have to take over, but I'm definitely not gonna underestimate Indiana again."

— An opposing Big Ten assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)

WR	80	**CHARLIE BECKER (JR.)**	6	Lebron Bond (So.)
WR	11	Nick Marsh* (Jr.)	4	Davion Chandler (So.)
WR	8	Tyler Morris (Sr.)	7	Shazz Preston* (Sr.)
LT	65	**CARTER SMITH (SR.)**	61	Baylor Wilkin (Fr.)
LG	56	Joe Brunner* (Sr.)	66	Evan Parker (Fr.)
C	62	**DREW EVANS (SR.)**	70	Austin Leibfried (So.)
RG	74	**BRAY LYNCH (SR.)**	77	Matt Marek (Fr.)
RT	72	Adedamola Ajani (So.)	71	Ben Novak (Fr.)
TE	85	Andrew Barker (Fr.)	88	Brock Schott* (Fr.)
QB	10	Josh Hoover* (Sr.)	15	Tyler Cherry (Fr.)
RB	28	Khobie Martin (So.)	1	Turbo Richard* (Jr.)

DEFENSE (6)

DE	7	Chiddi Obiazor* (Jr.)	17	Daniel Ndukwe (Jr.)
DT	95	**TYRIQUE TUCKER (SR.)**	90	Joe Hjelle* (Sr.)
DT	97	**MARIO LANDINO (JR.)**	94	Kyler Garcia (Fr.)
DE	12	Tobi Osunsanmi* (Sr.)	8	Josh Burnham* (Sr.)
OLB	5	**ROLIJAH HARDY (JR.)**	14	Kaiden Turner (Sr.)
ILB	46	**ISAIAH JONES (SR.)**	34	Jeff Utzinger (Sr.)
CB	22	**JAMARI SHARPE (SR.)**	0	Carson Williams* (So.)
CB	4	AJ Harris* (Sr.)	10	Ryland Gandy (Sr.)
ROVER	2	Byron Baldwin Jr. (So.)	13	Quan Sanks* (Jr.)
S	1	**AMARE FERRELL (SR.)**	3	Jaylen Bell (So.)
S	6	Preston Zachman* (Sr.)	33	Garrett Reese (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	15	Nico Radicic (Jr.)	KR	29 Lee Beebe Jr. (Sr.)
P	93	Quinn Warren (Jr.)	PR	8 Tyler Morris (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

INDIANA HOOSIERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 5 | BIG TEN PREDICTION: 2 | 2025 RECORD: 16-0, 9-0 BIG TEN

OFFENSE Head coach Curt Cignetti follows the maxim of "production over potential" when it comes to transfers. Josh Hoover, the former TCU quarterback who'll replace Heisman Trophy winner Fernando Mendoza, is that adage come to life. Hoover is the most productive returning QB in the FBS with 9,629 passing yards and 71 touchdowns across 36 games (31 starts). He has a turnover issue that needs fixing and doesn't have the same stature as Mendoza — he's very generously listed at 6-foot-2 — but Hoover is the kind of heady player who will thrive in Cignetti's scheme.

He will also benefit from the tremendous amount of experience on the offensive line. The group features three returning starters, including reigning Big Ten Offensive Lineman of the Year Carter Smith at left tackle.

Wide receiver Charlie Becker closed out 2025 looking like one of the country's top playmakers and made a series of spectacular grabs that helped IU win the national title. He will line up next to Michigan State's former top receiver Nick Marsh to give IU a potent passing attack.

Sophomore running back Khobie Martin is one to watch as well. The reserve has waited his turn and looks primed to have a breakout season.

DEFENSE Indiana added one of the top defensive ends (Tobi Osunsanmi) and cornerbacks (AJ Harris) out of the portal while bringing back six starters, including a pair of starting defensive tackles (Tyrique Tucker and Mario Landino) and linebackers (Rolijah Hardy and Isaiah Jones).

It's an impressive mix of talent that will enable defensive coordinator Bryant Haines to create the same kind of havoc as he did last year. The Hoosiers had the second-most sacks in the FBS (46) and led the country in tackles for a loss (129) by mixing in stunts and twists up front, along with simulated pressures and disguises in the back end.

SPECIALISTS Indiana special teams units were the best in the country. Returning placekicker Nico Radicic has been a sneaky weapon, having gone 28-of-30 on field-goal attempts since 2024. IU has plenty of talented athletes — receivers Tyler Morris and Shazz Preston along with running back Lee Beebe Jr. — capable of making an impact in the return game.

FINAL ANALYSIS Cignetti's impeccable track record in Bloomington makes it easy to envision a path back to the postseason. While Indiana needs to replace its first-ever Heisman winner and a handful of James Madison transfers (Aiden Fisher, Elijah Sarratt and D'Angelo Ponds) who became household names in the Big Ten, Cignetti has been the best talent evaluator in college football in recent years. Behind the scenes, there's a high degree of confidence that IU has built a lasting winner.

2025 RESULTS (16-0, 9-0 BIG TEN)

Aug. 30	Old Dominion	W	27-14
Sept. 6	Kennesaw State	W	56-9
Sept. 12	Indiana State	W	73-0
Sept. 20	Illinois	W	63-10
Sept. 27	at Iowa	W	20-15
Oct. 11	at Oregon	W	30-20
Oct. 18	Michigan State	W	38-13
Oct. 25	UCLA	W	56-6
Nov. 1	at Maryland	W	55-10
Nov. 8	at Penn State	W	27-24
Nov. 15	Wisconsin	W	31-7
Nov. 28	at Purdue	W	56-3
Dec. 6	vs. Ohio State #	W	13-10
Jan. 1	vs. Alabama %	W	38-3
Jan. 9	vs. Oregon &	W	56-22
Jan. 19	vs. Miami (Fla.) $	W	27-21

#Indianapolis %Rose Bowl: CFB Playoff Quarterfinal
&Peach Bowl: CFB Playoff Semifinal
$Miami: CFB Playoff National Championship

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	North Texas
Sept. 12	Howard
Sept. 19	WKU
Sept. 26	Northwestern
Oct. 3	at Rutgers
Oct. 10	at Nebraska
Oct. 17	Ohio State
Oct. 24	at Michigan
Oct. 31	Minnesota
Nov. 14	USC
Nov. 21	at Washington
Nov. 28	Purdue

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Henry Ohlinger, ATH	★★★★
2.	Gabe Hill, DL	★★★★
3.	Parker Elmore, TE	★★★★
4.	Kasmir Hicks, CB	★★★★
5.	Ronelle Johnson, EDGE	★★★★
6.	Ja'Dyn Williams, LB	★★★★
7.	D'Montae Tims, S	★★★★
8.	Kevontay Hugan, LB	★★★
9.	Cam McHaney, DL	★★★
10.	Trevor Gibbs, LB	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Curt Cignetti • Record at School: 27-2 (2 years)
Career Record: 146-37 (15 years) • Offensive Coordinators: Mike Shanahan, Tino Sunseri • Defensive Coordinator: Bryant Haines • Location: Bloomington, Ind. • Stadium: Memorial Stadium (53,524)

IOWA HAWKEYES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 25 | BIG TEN PREDICTION: 8 | 2025 RECORD: 9-4, 6-3 BIG TEN

OFFENSE Iowa added a program-record 16 players from the transfer portal, but none of them play quarterback. Head coach Kirk Ferentz seems to be saying that he believes he already has a capable successor to Mark Gronowski on the roster. Sophomore Jeremy Hecklinski and junior Hank Brown were in a hotly contested battle in the spring, with Hecklinski appearing to have a slight edge after having moved ahead of Brown on the depth chart about midway through the 2025 season. Neither played enough in 2025 to know how they would handle being the starter.

Iowa also has to replace three starters on the offensive line, all of whom made first-team All-Big Ten last season, including center Logan Jones, the 2025 Rimington Trophy winner as the nation's top center.

Three receivers arrived via the transfer portal, and Iowa has a rising star at tight end in sophomore and former walk-on DJ Vonnahme, who led the team with 434 receiving yards and three touchdown catches in 2025.

Kamari Moulton returns at running back after rushing for 878 yards and scoring five touchdowns last season.

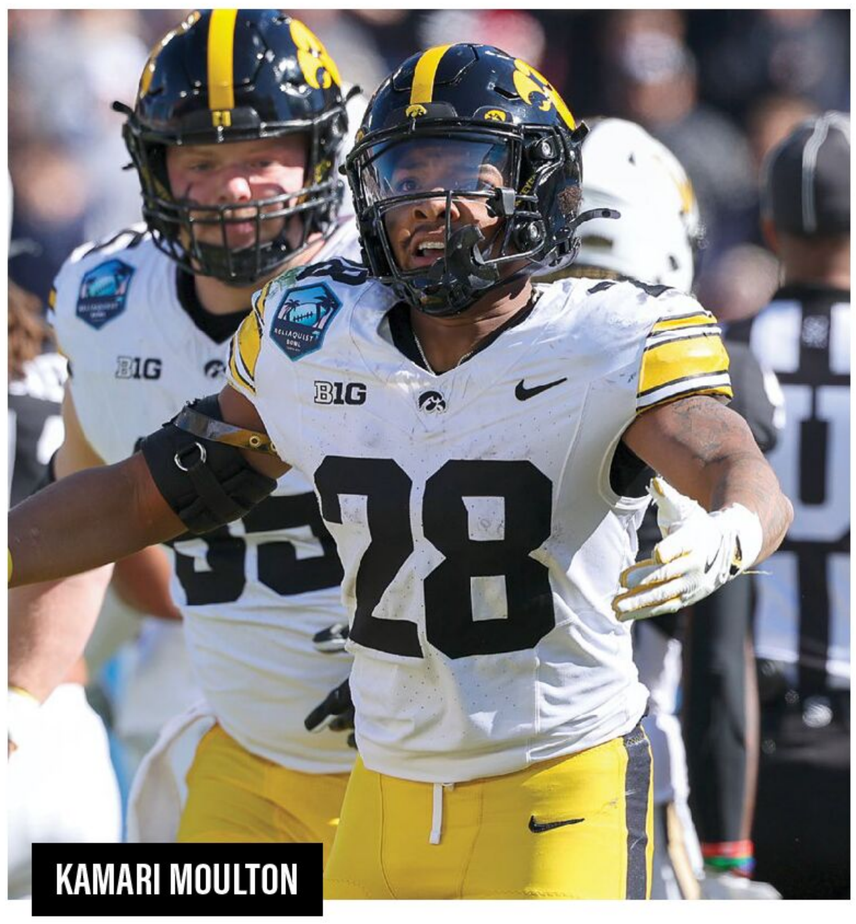
DEFENSE Veteran defensive coordinator Phil Parker has eight starters to replace on defense, including all four on the defensive line. Parker is widely regarded as one of the top defensive coordinators in college football, and he will certainly have a chance to show why this fall.

Iowa loaded up in the transfer portal, adding four linemen and four defensive backs, including safety Tyler Brown from James Madison.

Junior Zach Lutmer is also poised to be Iowa's next great defensive back after earning second-team All-Big Ten honors last season. He has played safety, cornerback and the cash position, which is a cross between a linebacker and safety.

SPECIALISTS Iowa's placekicker, punter and All-America return specialist Kaden Wetjen all departed. The Hawkeyes also have a new special teams coordinator, with Chris Polizzi replacing the highly successful LeVar Woods, who is now the assistant head coach and special teams coordinator for Michigan State. Iowa turned to the transfer portal, landing placekicker Eli Ozick and two punters — Australia native Boston Everitt and Tanner Philpott. Replacing Wetjen could require a group effort.

FINAL ANALYSIS Iowa has typically been built to win anywhere from seven to 10 games under Ferentz, and this season appears to be no exception despite the loss of so many starters. If the quarterback position rises to the challenge, Parker continues to work his magic on defense and if the special teams do their part, Iowa could make some noise, but those are big "ifs."



KAMARI MOULTON

SCOUTING THE HAWKEYES

"I heard that at Wake Forest, [former transfer quarterback] Jeremy Hecklinski struggled a bit there. Struggled to put on weight, struggled to buy into the intensity of college football a bit. I'm interested to see how he progresses at Iowa. ... It'll really be interesting to see with them the new philosophy of adding more transfers. What they've been doing has been working. It's been developmental, but in this day and age, you can't do that anymore. You have to adapt and make the right choices in the portal. I would still bet a lot of money that they're going to be really good, and the culture of their team will still be intact."

— An opposing Big Ten assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)				
WR	2	Reece Vander Zee (Jr.)	0	Jarriett Buie (Jr.)
WR	14	Tony Diaz (So.)	8	Evan James* (So.)
WR	1	KJ Parker (So.)	7	Dayton Howard (Jr.)
LT	**59**	**TREVOR LAUCK (JR.)**	75	Cannon Leonard (Jr.)
LG	64	Leighton Jones (Jr.)	68	Will Nolan (So.)
C	**58**	**KADE PIEPER (JR.)**	61	Cael Winter (Jr.)
RG	53	Michael Myslinski (Sr.)	60	Lucas Allgeyer (Fr.)
RT	71	Jack Dotzler (Sr.)	65	Trent Wilson* (So.)
TE	81	DJ Vonnahme (So.)	48	Zach Ortwerth (Sr.)
QB	10	Jeremy Hecklinski (So.)	9	Hank Brown (Jr.)
RB	28	**KAMARI MOULTON (JR.)**	21	Lendon Phillips Jr.* (Jr.)
DEFENSE (3)				
DE	97	Iose Epenesa (Fr.)	95	Lance Ingold* (So.)
DT	96	Bryce Hawthorne (Jr.)	51	Luke Gaffney (Sr.)
DT	92	Brice Stevenson* (Sr.)	91	Devan Kennedy (So.)
DE	44	Kenneth Merrieweather (Jr.)	43	Kahmari Brown* (Jr.)
LB	33	Cam Buffington (So.)	23	Landyn Van Kekerix (Sr.)
LB	**36**	**JAYDEN MONTGOMERY (SR.)**	22	Derek Weisskopf (So.)
CB	**8**	**DESHAUN LEE (SR.)**	11	Jacob Wallace (Fr.)
CB	7	Rashad Godfrey Jr. (So.)	3	Jaylen Watson (Jr.)
CASH	**6**	**ZACH LUTMER (JR.)**	19	Kyler Gerardy (So.)
S	5	Anthony Hawkins* (So.)	18	Xavier Styles* (So.)
S	2	Tyler Brown* (Jr.)	21	Marcello Vitti (Fr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	25	Eli Ozick* (Jr.)	KR 3	Jaylen Watson (Jr.)
P	49	Boston Everitt* (Fr.)	PR 1	KJ Parker (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

2025 RESULTS (9-4, 6-3 BIG TEN)

Aug. 30	UAlbany	W	34-7
Sept. 6	at Iowa State	L	13-16
Sept. 13	Massachusetts	W	47-7
Sept. 19	at Rutgers	W	38-28
Sept. 27	Indiana	L	15-20
Oct. 11	at Wisconsin	W	37-0
Oct. 18	Penn State	W	25-24
Oct. 25	Minnesota	W	41-3
Nov. 8	Oregon	L	16-18
Nov. 15	at USC	L	21-26
Nov. 22	Michigan State	W	20-17
Nov. 28	at Nebraska	W	40-16
Dec. 31	vs. Vanderbilt #	W	34-27

#Reliaquest Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	Northern Illinois
Sept. 12	Iowa State
Sept. 19	Northern Iowa
Sept. 26	at Michigan
Oct. 3	Ohio State
Oct. 10	at Washington
Oct. 24	at Minnesota
Oct. 31	Wisconsin
Nov. 7	at Northwestern
Nov. 14	Purdue
Nov. 21	at Illinois
Nov. 27	Nebraska

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Julian Manson, LB	★★★★
2.	Tradon Bessinger, QB	★★★★
3.	Darion Jones, CB	★★★★
4.	Kasen Thomas, LB	★★★★
5.	Hudson Parliament, IOL	★★★★
6.	Gene Riordan, IOL	★★★★
7.	Carson Nielsen, OT	★★★★
8.	Owen Linder, OT	★★★★
9.	Billy Weivoda, LB	★★★
10.	Colin Whitters, IOL	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Kirk Ferentz • Record at School: 213-128 (27 years)
Career Record: 225-149 (30 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Tim Lester
Defensive Coordinator: Phil Parker • Location: Iowa City, Iowa
Stadium: Kinnick Stadium (69,250)

RAY SEEBECK-IMAGN IMAGES

MALIK WASHINGTON

SCOUTING THE TERRAPINS

"They're hanging a lot on the quarterback [Malik Washington] and hoping that he repeats what he did as a freshman. I thought he was really impressive. I didn't think coming out of high school that he would be ready to do that. I know they lost eight straight, but he was not really the reason that they were losing. [Washington] is elite. He's a really good athlete, and we hit him a couple times, and it just didn't bother him. ... I think it'll be interesting how that whole thing stays together if they can be really productive on offense. I get the sense that they would like [head coach] Mike Locksley to work out. They're not trying to get rid of him, but it may just get to a point where they've gotta do what they've gotta do."

— An opposing Big Ten assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR	84	Kaleb Webb (Sr.)	10	Zymear Smith (Fr.)
WR	1	Na'eem Abdul-Rahim Gladding* (Jr.)	14	Jordan Scott (Sr.)
WR	13	Chris Durr Jr.* (Jr.)	11	Ryan Manning (Jr.)
LT	**76**	**RAHTREL PERRY (SR.)**	73	Davon Watkins (So.)
LG	55	Tellek Lockette* (Sr.)	68	Carlos Moore (Sr.)
C	**61**	**MICHAEL HERSHEY (JR.)**	50	Trevor Szymanski (So.)
RG	71	Ryan Howerton (So.)	77	Amory Hills (So.)
RT	**74**	**ISAIAH WRIGHT (SR.)**	70	Jaylen Gilchrist (Fr.)
TE	**9**	**DORIAN FLEMING (JR.)**	8	Preston Howard* (Sr.)
QB	**7**	**MALIK WASHINGTON (SO.)**	22	Devin Kargman* (Jr.)
RB	**0**	**DEJUAN WILLIAMS (SO.)**	25	Harry Dalton III* (Fr.)

DEFENSE (8)

DE	**11**	**SIDNEY STEWART (SO.)**	56	DD Holmes (So.)
NT	**98**	**EYAN THOMAS (JR.)**	88	Derrick LeBlanc* (Jr.)
DT	99	Lavon Johnson (Sr.)	50	EJ Moore Jr. (Jr.)
DE	**9**	**ZAHIR MATHIS (SO.)**	40	Nahsir Taylor (So.)
OLB	0	Zion Elee (Fr.)	32	Carlton Smith (So,)
MLB	**1**	**DANIEL WINGATE (SR.)**	23	Keyshawn Flowers (Jr.)
ILB	**3**	**TREY REDDICK (JR.)**	35	Keyari James (So.)
CB	**4**	**JAMARE GLASKER (SR.)**	24	Amari Jackson* (Sr.)
CB	**6**	**DONTAY JOYNER (SR.)**	21	Judah Jenkins (So.)
SS	**2**	**LAVAIN SCRUGGS (SR.)**	7	Gavin Edwards (Jr.)
FS	33	Messiah Delhomme (So.)	5	Darrell Carey (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	36	Sean O'Haire (So.)	KR	24	Iverson Howard (So.)
P	34	Bryce McFerson (Sr.)	PR	25	Ricardo Cooper Jr. (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

TOMMY GILLIGAN-IMAGN IMAGES

MARYLAND TERRAPINS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 58 | BIG TEN PREDICTION: 15 | 2025 RECORD: 4-8, 1-8 BIG TEN

OFFENSE Quarterback Malik Washington started 12 games, setting freshman school records for completions and yards, and he'll do more to make Maryland go now. New offensive coordinator Clint Trickett wants the 6-foot-5, 231-pounder to run the ball more, direct a faster-paced offense with increased motion and get off more snaps.

Rushing leader DeJuan Williams (501 yards) is back, but the Terrapins were next-to-last in the Big Ten with 104.3 yards rushing yards per game. If the Terps are smart, they'll run behind Big Ten All-Academic center Michael Hershey and tackles Rahtrel Perry and Isaiah Wright, key figures in a line that allowed the fifth-fewest sacks per game nationally.

Last year's wide receiver group ranked among the national leaders in drops. Kaleb Webb is the top returning pass-catcher with 22 for a 14.5-yard average, but running back Williams (45 receptions) and tight end Dorian Fleming (40) caught more balls. Transfers Na'eem Abdul-Rahim Gladding (Old Dominion) and Chris Durr Jr. (Wyoming) should help.

DEFENSE With eight starters back in 2026, defensive coordinator Ted Monachino sees the unit taking a major step. One thing's for certain: They have an edge. In addition to Freshman All-America ends Sidney Stewart and Zahir Mathis, the unit is adding rusher extraordinaire Zion Elee, arguably the most highly touted Terp recruit ever.

Returning 300-pounders Lavon Johnson and Eyan Thomas make Maryland Big Ten-big in the middle, and coaches are talking about quality depth all over. Big-play linebacker Daniel Wingate, a two-year starter, and Trey Reddick, his partner in ball-carrier harm, are key vets.

Returning corners Dontay Joyner and Jamare Glasker are draft prospects, and Boston College transfer Amari Jackson joins the big-play fray. Safeties Lavain Scruggs and Messiah Delhomme look solid, and Darrell Carey could be the next big thing.

SPECIALISTS Sean O'Haire had a first-team All-Big Ten season, leading the conference at 1.75 made field goals per game with the second-most accurate season (87.5%) ever at Maryland. Punter Bryce McFerson was second in the league with a 44.2-yard average, earning second-team All-Big Ten honors and regularly providing a field position edge.

FINAL ANALYSIS Maryland returns 71% of its 2025 statistical production, second only to Notre Dame nationally, and it's a spot head coach Mike Locksley has long hoped to reach — an experienced squad that's a little bigger and stronger. The bad news is that last year's team wasn't very productive. While Locksley has continued to pile up impressive recruiting classes, the clock is ticking more loudly on the eighth-year head coach.

2025 RESULTS (4-8, 1-8 BIG TEN)

Aug. 30	Florida Atlantic	W	39-7
Sept. 5	Northern Illinois	W	20-9
Sept. 13	Towson	W	44-17
Sept. 20	at Wisconsin	W	27-10
Oct. 4	Washington	L	20-24
Oct. 11	Nebraska	L	31-34
Oct. 18	at UCLA	L	17-20
Nov. 1	Indiana	L	10-55
Nov. 8	at Rutgers	L	20-35
Nov. 15	at Illinois	L	6-24
Nov. 22	Michigan	L	20-45
Nov. 29	at Michigan State	L	28-38

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	Hampton
Sept. 12	at UConn
Sept. 19	Virginia Tech
Sept. 26	UCLA
Oct. 3	at Nebraska
Oct. 10	at Ohio State
Oct. 17	Rutgers
Oct. 31	Illinois
Nov. 7	at Purdue
Nov. 14	Wisconsin
Nov. 21	at USC
Nov. 28	Penn State

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Zion Elee, EDGE	★★★★
2.	JaMarcus Whyce, DL	★★★
3.	Kaden Carter, LB	★★★
4.	Day'Jon Moore, IOL	★★★
5.	Javonte Williams, TE	★★★
6.	Sean Johnson, CB	★★★
7.	Zahir Cobb, S	★★★
8.	Darrell Carey, S	★★★
9.	Cam Brickle II, DL	★★★
10.	Hakim Satterwhite, CB	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Mike Locksley • Record at School: 37-49 (7+ years) • Career Record: 39-75 (9+ years) • Offensive Coordinator: Clint Trickett • Defensive Coordinator: Ted Monachino • Location: College Park, Md. • Stadium: SECU Stadium (46,185)

MICHIGAN WOLVERINES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 13 | BIG TEN PREDICTION: 4 | 2025 RECORD: 9-4, 7-2 BIG TEN

OFFENSE Michigan's 68th-ranked scoring offense gets a boost from a new face running the show and plenty of returning production. Offensive coordinator Jason Beck follows new head coach Kyle Whittingham from Utah, and Beck hopes to unlock quarterback Bryce Underwood after a disappointing freshman season. Look for the Wolverines to run more spread and to use Underwood more frequently in the run game.

Running back Jordan Marshall (932 yards, 10 TDs) returns and has some help in 5-star freshman Savion Hiter. Freshman star receiver Andrew Marsh (651 receiving yards, four TDs) elected to return, and Michigan dipped into the transfer portal to land JJ Buchanan (Utah) and Jaime Ffrench (Texas) for more passing targets.

With four starters back and more depth than last year, Michigan's offensive line is primed to make a jump as well.

DEFENSE Jay Hill from BYU takes over as defensive coordinator and wants to replicate the 2023 Michigan national title unit. That means varied looks, simulated blitzes, a mix of zone and man-coverage — all in the name of confusing opponents and forcing turnovers.

All-America defensive end John Henry Daley (11.5 sacks) follows the staff from Utah and will be an anchor up front, while Michigan is bullish on defensive tackles Trey Pierce and Enow Etta.

Linebacker is thin, but the Wolverines' secondary is seasoned and full of playmakers. Starting cornerbacks Jyaire Hill and Zeke Berry are back, along with a healthy Rod Moore at safety. Michigan added All-Big 12 defensive back Smith Snowden from Utah and Memphis safety Chris Bracy, a disruptive playmaker. If the unit can stay healthy, Michigan's defense has the ability to become a top unit in college football.

SPECIALISTS Veteran assistant Kerry Coombs takes over a special teams unit that struggled with fundamentals in 2025 and used the transfer portal to restock. Cameron Brown from UNLV is the favorite to win the punting job, while Pitt's Trey Butkowski was 20-of-23 on field-goal attempts as a freshman. Marsh made some explosive plays in the return game last year and is a front-runner to handle the job again this fall. Fellow wideouts Salesi Moa and Ffrench could be in the mix there as well.

FINAL ANALYSIS The cupboard is far from bare for Whittingham, who makes the jump to Michigan after more than 30 years at Utah, the final 21 as head coach. Whittingham and his staff used the portal to help fill some holes, though concerns with depth and a difficult schedule could make for some growing pains. A 9-3 season might be the ceiling for this team.

2025 RESULTS (9-4, 7-2 BIG TEN)

Aug. 30	New Mexico	W	34-17
Sept. 6	at Oklahoma	L	13-24
Sept. 13	Central Michigan	W	63-3
Sept. 20	at Nebraska	W	30-27
Oct. 4	Wisconsin	W	24-10
Oct. 11	at USC	L	13-31
Oct. 18	Washington	W	24-7
Oct. 25	at Michigan State	W	31-20
Nov. 1	Purdue	W	21-16
Nov. 15	at Northwestern	W	24-22
Nov. 22	at Maryland	W	45-20
Nov. 29	Ohio State	L	9-27
Dec. 31	vs. Texas #	L	27-41

#Citrus Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	Western Michigan
Sept. 12	Oklahoma
Sept. 19	UTEP
Sept. 26	Iowa
Oct. 3	at Minnesota
Oct. 17	Penn State
Oct. 24	Indiana
Oct. 31	at Rutgers
Nov. 7	Michigan State
Nov. 14	at Oregon
Nov. 21	UCLA
Nov. 28	at Ohio State

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Savion Hiter, RB	★★★★★
2.	Carter Meadows, EDGE	★★★★★
3.	Salesi Moa, ATH	★★★★★
4.	Malakai Lee, OT	★★★★
5.	Titan Davis, DL	★★★★
6.	Jamarion Vincent, CB	★★★★
7.	Travis Johnson, WR	★★★★
8.	Marky Walbridge, IOL	★★★★
9.	Tommy Carr, QB	★★★★
10.	Jordan Deck, S	★★★★

*Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Kyle Whittingham • Record at School: First Season • Career Record: 177-88 (21+ years) • Offensive Coordinator: Jason Beck • Defensive Coordinator: Jay Hill • Location: Ann Arbor, Mich. • Stadium: Michigan Stadium (107,601)

BRYCE UNDERWOOD

SCOUTING THE WOLVERINES

"I love that roster. The second that [ex-Michigan head coach] Sherrone Moore was gone, they actually got to run that roster. There are four or five players in that freshman class who'll contribute immediately, and they had a bunch of freshmen last year who contributed. On offense, you're gonna have Bryce [Underwood], Andrew Marsh and Jaime Ffrench and JJ Buchanan out of the portal. There's a lot of excitement for what that team can be this year. ... The 2027 season was the target because they really liked that 2025 class, so the thought was to build it for that third year and focus on retaining those guys while bringing in younger players. I think they can win the conference. It's not a group with a lot of household names, but there's a lot of depth with really good players."

— An opposing Big Ten assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR	3	**ANDREW MARSH (SO.)**	9	Channing Goodwin (Jr.)
WR	13	JJ Buchanan* (So.)	81	Jamar Browder (So.)
WR	10	Jaime Ffrench* (So.)	12	Salesi Moa (Fr.)
LT	77	**BLAKE FRAZIER (JR.)**	65	Andrew Babalola (So.)
LG	71	**EVAN LINK (SR.)**	74	Avery Gach (So.)
C	53	**JAKE GUARNERA (JR.)**	67	Houston Ka'aha'aina-Torres* (So.)
RG	55	Nathan Efobi (Sr.)	50	Luke Hamilton (Jr.)
RT	54	**ANDREW SPRAGUE (JR.)**	70	Brady Norton (Sr.)
TE	83	Zack Marshall (Sr.)	80	Hogan Hansen (Jr.)
QB	19	**BRYCE UNDERWOOD (SO.)**		Brayden Fowler-Nicolosi* (Sr.)
RB	23	Jordan Marshall (Jr.)	5	Savion Hiter (Fr.)

DEFENSE (3)

DE	90	John Henry Daley* (Sr.)	94	Nate Marshall (So.)
DT	17	Enow Etta (Sr.)	91	Jonah Lea'ea (Sr.)
DT	95	**TREY PIERCE (SR.)**	54	Deyvid Palepale (Jr.)
DE	9	Cameron Brandt (Sr.)	8	Dominic Nichols (Jr.)
ILB	18	Troy Bowles (Sr.)	12	Nathaniel Owusu-Boateng (So.)
ILB	29	Chase Taylor (So.)	13	Aisea Moa* (Sr.)
CB	0	**JYAIRE HILL (SR.)**	2	Shamari Earls (So.)
CB	10	**ZEKE BERRY (SR.)**	16	Jo'Ziah Edmond (Jr.)
NB	3	Smith Snowden* (Sr.)	20	Chris Bracy* (Jr.)
S	1	Rod Moore (Sr.)	25	Mason Curtis (Jr.)
S	20	Chris Bracy* (Jr.)	6	Jordan Young (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	99	Trey Butkowski* (So.)	KR 3	Andrew Marsh (So.)
P		Cameron Brown* (So.)	PR 3	Andrew Marsh (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

DYLAN WIDGER-IMAGN IMAGES

JORDAN HALL

SCOUTING THE SPARTANS

"Their entire staff of position coaches made me go, 'Oh, s—. Interesting.' They brought in a lot of good coaches, so I think they'll be a good team this year. I don't think they added a lot of players that change the game for them, but you could tell from the outside that the culture wasn't great. Maybe them losing a bunch of players and talent and completely hitting the reset button is actually a good thing. I'm pretty bullish on them. ... I thought picking up [offensive line coach] Nick Tabacca was really smart. And [safeties coach] James Adams, he is absolutely unbelievable. He's the best I've ever been around in terms of a coach, an evaluator, a recruiter; he makes his guys want to run through a brick well every day. Any staff that he's on, stock up big time."

— An opposing Big Ten assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (1)

WR	6	Fredrick Moore* (Jr.)	5	Samson Gash (Fr.)
WR	8	KK Smith* (Jr.)	22	Jack Yanachik (Jr.)
WR	13	Chrishon McCray (Sr.)	16	Zach Washington (Fr.)
LT	75	Ben Murawski* (Sr.)	71	Robert Wright Jr.* (Jr.)
LG	52	Nick Sharpe* (Sr.)	70	Luka Vincic (Sr.)
C	63	Trent Fraley* (Sr.)	50	Antonio Johnson (Fr.)
RG	55	Rakeem Johnson (So.)	77	Andrew Dennis (So.)
RT	**58**	**CONNER MOORE (SR.)**	73	Rustin Young (So.)
TE	12	Carson Gulker* (Sr.)	82	Brennan Parachek (Jr.)
QB	11	Alessio Milivojevic (So.)	2	Cam Fancher* (Sr.)
RB	0	Cam Edwards* (Sr.)	7	Brandon Tullis (Jr.)

DEFENSE (0)

EDGE	23	Kenny Soares Jr.* (Sr.)	11	Anelu Lafaele (So.)
DT	55	Ben Roberts (Sr.)	98	Derrick Simmons (Fr.)
DT	96	Eli Coenen* (Jr.)	52	Mikeshun Beeler (So.)
DL	51	Kekai Burnett (So.)	25	Carlos Hazelwood (So.)
WLB	44	Caleb Wheatland* (Sr.)	18	Dion Crawford* (Sr.)
MLB	5	Jordan Hall (Sr.)	45	Brady Pretzlaff (So.)
CB	19	Charles Brantley* (Sr.)	22	Tyran Chappell* (So.)
CB	3	Tre Bell* (Sr.)	0	NiJhay Burt (Sr.)
NB	7	Michael Richard* (Sr.)	34	Khalil Majeed (Sr.)
S	21	Nikai Martinez (Sr.)	2	Devin Vaught* (Jr.)
S	30	Aveon Grose (Sr.)	31	Deuce Edwards (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	37	Liam Boyd* (Sr.)	KR	32 Kenneth Williams* (Jr.)
P	9	Rhys Dakin* (Jr.)	PR	5 Samson Gash (Fr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

JUNFU HAN

MICHIGAN STATE SPARTANS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 72 | BIG TEN PREDICTION: 17 | 2025 RECORD: 4-8, 1-8 BIG TEN

OFFENSE Starting quarterback Alessio Milivojevic continues to run with the opportunity after throwing for 986 yards across four starts in 2025. Twenty-five sacks in those games show he'll need a quicker trigger and help from his offensive line, built from portal additions like tackle Ben Murawski (UConn) and center Trent Fraley (North Dakota State). In the backfield, UConn transfer Cam Edwards' 1,240 yards from scrimmage ranked 13th in the FBS last year, but that came against a weaker schedule.

Offensive coordinator Nick Sheridan's calling card is putting playmakers in position to perform. Tight end-quarterback-receiver-magician Carson Gulker, a transfer from Div. II national champion Ferris State, should give him lots of options, as should receiver Chrishon McCray. This group will float around average, but it'll make you say "wow" a few times each game.

DEFENSE When coordinator Joe Rossi put together his staff, he focused on energizers. This defense will run into some personnel problems, but the Spartans hope they can develop inferior talent beyond expectations.

Senior Jordan Hall is the Mike linebacker, and he gets some help with productive transfers Caleb Wheatland (Auburn) and Dion Crawford (Buffalo). Nikai Martinez returns at safety with old teammate Charles Brantley, who spent last season at Miami (Fla.), coming back at corner.

Michigan State took the ball away from its opponents only nine times last season, the sixth-lowest total in the FBS. That had more to do with a defensive front that couldn't generate pressure than it did a secondary lacking true playmakers. The defensive line room is thin again, which will cause problems.

SPECIALISTS Coordinator LeVar Woods made Iowa special teams famous, and now he leaves Kirk Ferentz's staff to do the same at Michigan State. The devil is in the details, he says, and his players learned well. It took him four pages of notes to install plays for Aussie punter Rhys Dakin, who follows his coach from Iowa and fills the shoes of NFL-bound Ryan Eckley. Transfer placekicker Liam Boyd missed more short kicks (4-for-6) than long (3-for-4) at Charlotte, but Michigan State's offense may need him kicking from long range anyway. In the return game, a lot of speedy wideouts will compete for reps.

FINAL ANALYSIS A lot of players need to get a lot better, quickly, for Michigan State to win more than four or five games this season. But that's expected for new head coach Pat Fitzgerald and Co. in what amounts to a rebuilding year. Success will be measured by how this season prepares the team for the next, which is probably the last thing the Spartan faithful want to hear. That's the price of changing coaches twice in three seasons.

2025 RESULTS (4-8, 1-8 BIG TEN)

Aug. 29	Western Michigan	W	23-6
Sept. 6	Boston College (ot)	W	42-40
Sept. 13	Youngstown State	W	41-24
Sept. 20	at USC	L	31-45
Oct. 4	at Nebraska	L	27-38
Oct. 11	UCLA	L	13-38
Oct. 18	at Indiana	L	13-38
Oct. 25	Michigan	L	20-31
Nov. 1	at Minnesota (ot)	L	20-23
Nov. 15	Penn State	L	10-28
Nov. 22	at Iowa	L	17-20
Nov. 29	Maryland	W	38-28

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	Toledo
Sept. 12	Eastern Michigan
Sept. 19	at Notre Dame
Sept. 26	Nebraska
Oct. 3	at Wisconsin
Oct. 10	Illinois
Oct. 17	Northwestern
Oct. 24	at UCLA
Nov. 7	at Michigan
Nov. 14	Washington
Nov. 21	Oregon
Nov. 28	at Rutgers

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Collin Campbell, OT	★★★★
2.	Eli Bickel, IOL	★★★★
3.	Samson Gash, WR	★★★★
4.	Kayd Coffman, QB	★★★★
5.	Joe Caudill, TE	★★★★
6.	Zach Washington, WR	★★★
7.	Brayden Thomas, S	★★★
8.	Adam Shaw, LB	★★★
9.	Eddie Whiting, TE	★★★
10.	Tristan Comer, OT	★★★

**Per Rivals*

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Pat Fitzgerald • Record at School: First Season • Career Record: 110-101 (17 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Nick Sheridan • Defensive Coordinators: Joe Rossi, Max Bullough • Location: East Lansing, Mich. • Stadium: Spartan Stadium (75,005)

MINNESOTA GOLDEN GOPHERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 42 | BIG TEN PREDICTION: 11 | 2025 RECORD: 8-5, 5-4 BIG TEN

OFFENSE Head coach P.J. Fleck turned heads at Big Ten Media Days last year when he shared his goal of a College Football Playoff bid in 2025 despite an inexperienced quarterback. That didn't happen, but QB Drake Lindsey built a foundation. His play — 63% completion rate, 2,382 passing yards, 18 touchdowns and only six interceptions — inspired hope for a potential jump in his redshirt sophomore season.

Minnesota retained its Nos. 2-4 pass-catchers and added three wideouts via the portal, with Cincinnati's Noah Jennings topping the list.

To help Lindsey out, Minnesota must improve in the run game. The Gophers ranked 116th in the nation at 3.57 yards per carry. Poor offensive line play was a key factor, and Minnesota is banking on improvements from returning starters and contributors.

Senior running back Darius Taylor has worked with a chef and taken Pilates classes to be at his best. He led Minnesota with 915 yards from scrimmage (670 rushing, 245 receiving) last season. If he reaches 1,500 this fall, it will certainly enhance Minnesota's postseason prospects.

DEFENSE The Gophers have the seventh-highest percentage of returning production for 2026 according to ESPN, with 71% of their offense and 65% of their defense coming back.

The key defection, however, was rising junior safety/returner/receiver Koi Perich, who transferred to Oregon. While Perich had a sophomore slump in 2025, his departure might lower Minnesota's ceiling.

The Gophers retained redshirt junior safety Kerry Brown, who was more reliable than Perich a year ago, and have other playmakers, notably linebacker Maverick Baranowski (tied for sixth in Big Ten with 103 tackles) and defensive end Anthony Smith (Big Ten-best 12.5 sacks). The biggest addition via the portal is TJ Bush Jr. from Cal; the senior end has amassed 91 pressures and 13 sacks across three years.

Minnesota lost its top four defensive tackles from last year, meaning 310-pound Marshall transfer Naquan Crowder needs to be an anchor.

SPECIALISTS Field-goal kicking was a struggle last season, leading to a competition between Beckham Sunderland, a Michigan transfer, and Daniel Jackson. But neither has attempted a collegiate field goal. Punter Tom Weston had a quality first season, but with Perich's exit, the Gophers will need to find primary returners for both punts and kickoffs.

FINAL ANALYSIS The Gophers are in the bottom half of the Big Ten in paying players but have consistently finished in the top half of the league. That should continue this fall, especially if Lindsey can make a leap.

2025 RESULTS (8-5, 5-4 BIG TEN)

Aug. 28	Buffalo	W	23-10
Sept. 6	Northwestern State	W	66-0
Sept. 13	at Cal	L	14-27
Sept. 27	Rutgers	W	31-28
Oct. 4	at Ohio State	L	3-42
Oct. 11	Purdue	W	27-20
Oct. 17	Nebraska	W	24-6
Oct. 25	at Iowa	L	3-41
Nov. 1	Michigan State (ot)	W	23-20
Nov. 14	at Oregon	L	13-42
Nov. 22	at Northwestern	L	35-38
Nov. 29	Wisconsin	W	17-7
Dec. 26	vs. New Mexico # (ot)	W	20-17

#Rate Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 3	Eastern Illinois
Sept. 12	Mississippi State
Sept. 19	Akron
Sept. 26	at Washington
Oct. 3	Michigan
Oct. 10	at Purdue
Oct. 24	Iowa
Oct. 31	at Indiana
Nov. 7	UCLA
Nov. 14	at Penn State
Nov. 21	Northwestern
Nov. 28	at Wisconsin

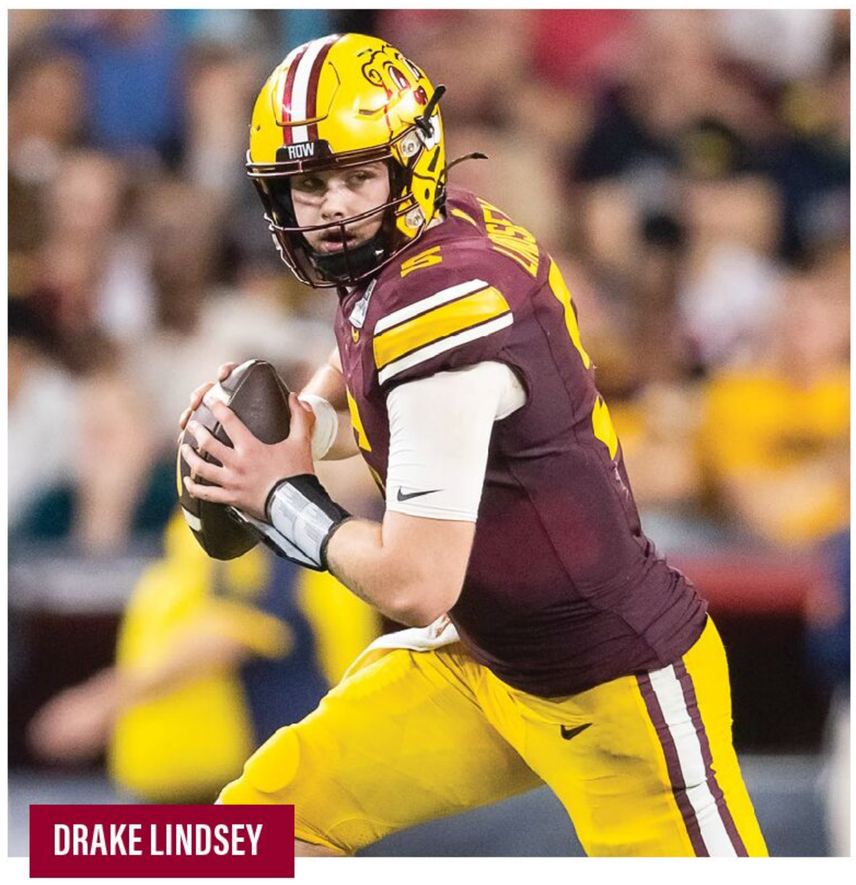
TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Aaden Aytch, EDGE	★★★★
2.	Quayd Hendryx, WR	★★★★
3.	Howie Johnson, DL	★★★★
4.	Ryan Estrada, RB	★★★★
5.	Roman Voss, TE	★★★
6.	Andrew Trout, OT	★★★
7.	Hudson Dunn, LB	★★★
8.	Gavin Meier, IOL	★★★
9.	Rico Blassingame, WR	★★★
10.	Lamont Hamilton, CB	★★★

*Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: P.J. Fleck • Record at School: 66-44 (9 years) • Career Record: 96-66 (13 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Greg Harbaugh Jr. • Defensive Coordinator: Danny Collins • Location: Minneapolis, Minn. • Stadium: Huntington Bank Stadium (50,805)



DRAKE LINDSEY

SCOUTING THE GOPHERS

"They're so consistent. I would anticipate them staying at the level they've been at, probably not competing for the conference. I wouldn't call them a dark horse. They won't be in the bottom half [of the Big Ten]. ... They evaluate really well. They're just like Illinois. Their GM [Gerrit Chernoff] is awesome. They have a really, really good personnel staff. They know exactly what their wheelhouse is, and they strike really well in it. It's funny because P.J. Fleck's thing is 'Row the Boat,' which is so fitting for them because in college football, whether the decision is right or wrong, as long as everybody is in it together, you're usually gonna do something good. That's what they are."

— An opposing Big Ten assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR	8	**JALEN SMITH (SO.)**	3	Perry Thompson* (Jr.)
WR	11	Javon Tracy (Sr.)	7	Bradley Martino (Fr.)
WR	13	Noah Jennings* (Sr.)	84	Hayden Moore (Fr.)
LT	50	**NATHAN ROY (SO.)**	60	Kaveon Lee (Fr.)
LG	59	Tony Nelson (Sr.)	77	Nick Spence (Fr.)
C	78	**ASHTON BEERS (SR.)**	56	Brett Carroll (So.)
RG	65	**GREG JOHNSON (SR.)**	58	Jaden Ball (So.)
RT	51	Daniel Shipp (Fr.)	68	Bennett Warren* (So.)
TE	19	Pierce Walsh (Jr.)	88	Jacob Simpson (So.)
QB	5	**DRAKE LINDSEY (SO.)**	6	Max Shikenjanski (Jr.)
RB	1	**DARIUS TAYLOR (SR.)**	2	A.J. Turner (Sr.)

DEFENSE (5)

DE	0	**ANTHONY SMITH (SR.)**	11	Karter Menz (Jr.)
DT	70	Naquan Crowder* (Jr.)	55	Jaylin Hicks (So.)
DT	93	Riley Sunram (So.)	90	Xion Chapman (Jr.)
DE	13	TJ Bush Jr.* (Sr.)	1	**JAXON HOWARD (JR.)**
LB	6	**MAVERICK BARANOWSKI (SR.)**	46	Mason Carrier (So.)
LB	49	Matt Kingsbury (Jr.)	2	Emmanuel Karmo (So.)
CB	17	**JOHN NESTOR (SR.)**	21	Naiim Parrish (So.)
CB	5	Aydan West* (So.)	8	Mike Gerald (So.)
NB	9	Garrison Monroe (Jr.)	13	Zahir Rainer (So.)
S	14	**KERRY BROWN (JR.)**	4	Zack Harden (So.)
S	7	Aidan Gousby (Sr.)	22	Mekhai Smith* (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	92	Beckham Sunderland* (Sr.)	KR	13 Noah Jennings* (Sr.)
P	42	Tom Weston (Jr.)	PR	11 Javon Tracy (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

MARK J. REBILAS-IMAGN IMAGES

NYZIAH HUNTER

SCOUTING THE CORNHUSKERS

"They're in a ton of denial with the quarterback situation. Dylan Raiola is as good as they get as a player and as a person; losing him, I thought he was their last hope. He was the pin that was holding that thing together. I don't imagine they're gonna do anything special. I think five wins, maybe six wins at the most [this] year. If they hit seven, I'd be shocked. ... [Head coach] Matt Rhule has some great aspects. He can make you run through a wall, but there's just always so much turnover with his staff. I know that it's a tough environment for those coaches to be in. Rhule makes it like that on purpose because he doesn't want you to get comfortable. I don't want to say his model isn't going to work, but I don't know."

— An opposing Big Ten assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR	13	**NYZIAH HUNTER (JR.)**	18	Quinn Clark (So.)
WR	11	Kwazi Gilmer* (Jr.)	19	Cortez Mills Jr. (So.)
WR	2	**JACORY BARNEY JR. (JR.)**	17	Larry Miles (Fr.)
LT	57	**ELIJAH PRITCHETT (SR.)**	71	Claude Mpouma (Fr.)
LG	65	Paul Mubenga* (Jr.)	62	Sam Sledge (Jr.)
C	51	**JUSTIN EVANS (SR.)**	58	Jake Peters (So.)
RG	54	Brendan Black* (Sr.)	75	Tyler Knaak (Sr.)
RT	55	Tree Babalade* (Jr.)	77	**GUNNAR GOTTULA (JR.)**
TE	44	**LUKE LINDENMEYER (SR.)**	4	Janiran Bonner (Jr.)
QB	10	Anthony Colandrea* (Sr.)	14	TJ Lateef (So.)
RB	35	Mekhi Nelson (So.)	22	Isaiah Mozee (So.)

DEFENSE (6)

DE	15	Anthony Jones Jr.* (Sr.)	96	**WILLIAMS NWANERI (SO.)**
DT	5	Riley Van Poppel (Jr.)	92	Sua Lefotu (Jr.)
DT	44	Jahsear Whittington* (So.)	34	Owen Stoudmire* (Sr.)
DE	11	**CAMERON LENHARDT (SO.)**	93	Kade Pietrzak (So.)
LB	9	**VINCENT SHAVERS JR. (JR.)**	24	Dexter Foster* (Jr.)
LB	33	Owen Chambliss* (Jr.)	40	Dawson Merritt (So.)
CB	10	**ANDREW MARSHALL (SR.)**	22	Victor Evans III* (Sr.)
CB	25	Jeremiah Charles (Jr.)	16	Danny Odem III (Fr.)
S	26	Dwayne McDougle III (Sr.)	23	Caleb Benning (So.)
S	13	Jamir Conn (Sr.)	21	**REX GUTHRIE (SO.)**
S	37	**DONOVAN JONES (SO.)**	31	Mario Buford (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	91	Kyle Cunanan (Jr.)	KR	2 Jacory Barney Jr. (Jr.)
P	83	Archie Wilson (So.)	PR	2 Jacory Barney Jr. (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** · *2026 TRANSFER

TOMMY GILLIGAN-IMAGN IMAGES

NEBRASKA CORNHUSKERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 38 | BIG TEN PREDICTION: 10 | 2025 RECORD: 7-6, 4-5 BIG TEN

OFFENSE Nebraska's offense goes in a new direction in 2026 with quarterback Anthony Colandrea, the reigning Mountain West Offensive Player of the Year, transferring in from UNLV. Colandrea's mobility and ability to extend plays could bring more explosiveness and create big-play opportunities for a veteran wide receiver group that returns starters Nyziah Hunter (43 catches, 617 yards, five TDs) and Jacory Barney Jr. (45 catches, 484 yards, five TDs) and adds productive transfer Kwazi Gilmer from UCLA. Sophomore wideout Quinn Clark has breakout potential as well.

The Huskers eschewed a transfer portal back to replace All-American Emmett Johnson and will turn to returners Mekhi Nelson and Isaiah Mozee, who both saw time, albeit sparingly, behind Johnson. Freshman Jamal Rule is another name to watch in 2026.

Up front, Nebraska added veteran guards Paul Mubenga and Brendan Black from LSU and Iowa State, respectively, as well as tackle Tree Babalade from South Carolina, all of whom bring size and experience. Veteran starting center Justin Evans and left tackle Elijah Pritchett return, giving the team a bigger, more agile line in 2026.

DEFENSE Defensive coordinator Rob Aurich arrives from San Diego State, hoping for the same quick turnaround that he engineered with the Aztecs. Nebraska will run an attacking 4-2-5 scheme and seek balance after finishing No. 3 against the pass in 2025 but No. 98 against the run. Aurich's 2025 group at SDSU finished 12th in the country in total defense.

Improvement along the defensive line, where veterans Riley Van Poppel, Williams Nwaneri and Cameron Lenhardt return, is paramount. Transfer portal additions Jahsear Whittington and Anthony Jones Jr. will be expected to add instant pass rush for a defense that averaged fewer than two sacks per game on the year. The linebacker corps should be improved with returning starter Vincent Shavers Jr. and the additions of San Diego State's Owen Chambliss and Oregon State's Dexter Foster.

SPECIALISTS Last year, the Huskers engineered a big turnaround on special teams under coordinator Mike Ekeler, who moved on to USC in the offseason. Former NFL and Nebraska kicker Brett Maher takes over the group, which returns placekicker Kyle Cunanan (16-of-19 on field goals in 2025) and ambipedal punter Archie Wilson.

FINAL ANALYSIS Back-to-back bowl games represented progress, but in Year 4 of the Matt Rhule era, new pieces and schemes will need to click quickly for Nebraska to show additional growth in 2026 against a difficult Big Ten schedule that features Indiana, Ohio State and Oregon.

2025 RESULTS (7-6, 4-5 BIG TEN)

Aug. 28	vs. Cincinnati #	W	20-17
Sept. 6	Akron	W	68-0
Sept. 13	Houston Christian	W	59-7
Sept. 20	Michigan	L	27-30
Oct. 4	Michigan State	W	38-27
Oct. 11	at Maryland	W	34-31
Oct. 17	at Minnesota	L	6-24
Oct. 25	Northwestern	W	28-21
Nov. 1	USC	L	17-21
Nov. 8	at UCLA	W	28-21
Nov. 22	at Penn State	L	10-37
Nov. 28	Iowa	L	16-40
Dec. 31	vs. Utah %	L	22-44

#Kansas City, MO %Las Vegas Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	Ohio
Sept. 12	Bowling Green
Sept. 19	North Dakota
Sept. 26	at Michigan State
Oct. 3	Maryland
Oct. 10	Indiana
Oct. 17	at Oregon
Oct. 31	Washington
Nov. 7	at Illinois
Nov. 14	at Rutgers
Nov. 21	Ohio State
Nov. 27	at Iowa

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Danny Odem III, CB	★★★★
2.	Claude Mpouma, OT	★★★★
3.	Jamal Rule, RB	★★★
4.	Luke Sorensen, TE	★★★
5.	Larry Miles, WR	★★★
6.	Nalin Scott, WR	★★★
7.	Rex Waterman, IOL	★★★
8.	Dylan Berymon, DL	★★★
9.	Hayden Ainsworth, IOL	★★★
10.	Jase Reynolds, LB	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Matt Rhule • Record at School: 19-19 (3 years) • Career Record: 66-62 (10 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Dana Holgorsen • Defensive Coordinator: Rob Aurich • Location: Lincoln, Neb. • Stadium: Memorial Stadium (85,458)

NORTHWESTERN WILDCATS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 57 | BIG TEN PREDICTION: 14 | 2025 RECORD: 7-6, 4-5 BIG TEN

OFFENSE Northwestern has never made a hire quite like new offensive coordinator Chip Kelly. The 62-year-old's task is upgrading an offense that has flatlined for some time — 129th nationally in scoring (21.3 ppg) since 2014. "You don't feel like there are any wasted plays," head coach David Braun says of Kelly's system. "The ability to change the tempo at which you're playing, but still operate within the offense, is seamless."

Kelly recruited Aidan Chiles while coaching UCLA and will work with the Michigan State transfer quarterback, who showed promise early in his career but was benched late last season.

Northwestern didn't take any transfer wide receivers and will lean on Griffin Wilde, a third-team All-Big Ten selection in 2025, and emerging Haydon Eligon II. The team is bullish about tight end transfers Alex Honig (6-foot-6, 275) and Luke Dehnicke, but Braun notes, "The mid-tier of that wide receiver room is going to have to elevate."

Running back projects well with Caleb Komolafe, Joseph Himon II, short-yardage ace Robby Preckel and several transfers. The offensive line improved in 2025 but must replace multiple NFL departures. Oklahoma State tackle Grant Seagren is the biggest addition, and he joins standout interior lineman Ezomo Oratokhai.

DEFENSE Northwestern should have one of the Big Ten's best secondaries, headlined by all-league safety Robert Fitzgerald, cornerback Josh Fussell and nickel Braden Turner. A healthy Damon Walters at field safety is key, but Braun likes the depth and talent.

Linebacker and defensive end should be solid, especially if transfers Kobie McKinzie (Oklahoma) and Jamaal Johnson (UCF) complement holdovers Braydon Brus and Michael Kilbane, who had 7.5 tackles for a loss and 3.5 sacks in 2025. Northwestern has questions at defensive tackle around senior Brendan Flakes.

SPECIALISTS Northwestern added Bowling Green transfer placekicker Jackson Kleather. Decorated recruit Nikola Dugandzic should take over punting in his second season, while Himon and wide receivers Drew Wagner and Chase Farrell should handle returns. Assistant coach Paul Creighton will focus solely on special teams this season.

FINAL ANALYSIS Kelly's arrival and the October opening of the $862 million brand-new Ryan Field fuel excitement. Northwestern is investing in football, and Braun wants to become a College Football Playoff contender. His plan might take time, though, as Northwestern visits Indiana, Oregon and Ohio State and hosts Penn State and Iowa. A third bowl appearance in four seasons is a reasonable goal.

2025 RESULTS (7-6, 4-5 BIG TEN)

Aug. 30	at Tulane	L	3-23
Sept. 5	Western Illinois	W	42-7
Sept. 13	Oregon	L	14-34
Sept. 27	UCLA	W	17-14
Oct. 4	ULM	W	42-7
Oct. 11	at Penn State	W	22-21
Oct. 18	Purdue	W	19-0
Oct. 25	at Nebraska	L	21-28
Nov. 7	at USC	L	17-38
Nov. 15	Michigan	L	22-24
Nov. 22	Minnesota	W	38-35
Nov. 29	at Illinois	L	13-20
Dec. 26	vs. Central Michigan #	W	34-7

#GameAbove Sports Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	South Dakota State
Sept. 19	Colorado
Sept. 26	at Indiana
Oct. 3	Penn State
Oct. 10	Ball State
Oct. 17	at Michigan State
Oct. 24	Rutgers
Oct. 31	at Oregon
Nov. 7	Iowa
Nov. 14	at Ohio State
Nov. 21	at Minnesota
Nov. 28	Illinois

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Jaden McDuffie, WR	★★★★
2.	Owen Fors, IOL	★★★★
3.	Jack Fuchs, OT	★★★
4.	Leighton Burbach, OT	★★★
5.	Nick Zalewski, EDGE	★★★
6.	Tre Hoskins, DL	★★★
7.	Sean Morris II, RB	★★★
8.	Jacob Miller, OT	★★★
9.	Gabe Davis-Ray, S	★★★
10.	Tom McGlinchey, TE	★★★

*Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: David Braun • Record at School: 19-19 (3 years)
Career Record: 19-19 (3 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Chip Kelly
Defensive Coordinator: Tim McGarigle • Location: Evanston, Ill.
Stadium: Ryan Field (35,000)

GRIFFIN WILDE

SCOUTING THE WILDCATS

"I was super interested in the [new Northwestern offensive coordinator] Chip Kelly move. Just from a personnel-meeting-scheme standpoint, I just imagine their personnel department was like, 'What the f— do we do now?' Everything they've built with that team is like this ground-and-pound, man-zone running scheme that you have some play-action of it. I thought they had a couple of good young players. I don't think they evaluate like Minnesota or Illinois, but I wouldn't say they're poor at it. ... Kelly is run-heavy, and there's this misconception that he's been someone who throws it all over the yard. He's not, he's just a tempo guy, and that's not their game at all. I don't think it was a shocking move, but I think it raised some eyebrows."

— An opposing Big Ten assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)

WR	17	**GRIFFIN WILDE (SR.)**	10	Ricky Ahumaraeze (Jr.)
WR	80	**HAYDEN ELIGON II (JR.)**	14	Dube Enongene (Fr.)
WR	19	Drew Wagner (Jr.)	20	Chase Farrell (So.)
LT	74	Grant Seagren* (Jr.)	71	Dennis Rahouski (So.)
LG	73	Deuce McGuire (Sr.)	78	Trey Boyd (Fr.)
C	62	**EZOMO ORATOKHAI (SO.)**	77	Idrys Cotton (So.)
RG	77	Idrys Cotton (So.)	64	Anthony Birsa (Jr.)
RT	75	Arkel Anugwom* (Jr.)	61	David Anchondo* (Jr.)
TE	86	Alex Honig* (Sr.)	84	Luke Dehnicke* (So.)
QB	0	Aidan Chiles* (Sr.)	2	Ryan Boe (So.)
RB	5	**CALEB KOMOLAFE (JR.)**	6	Joseph Himon II (Sr.)

DEFENSE (5)

DE	47	Michael Kilbane (Sr.)	5	Dominic Kirks* (So.)
DT	15	**BRENDAN FLAKES (SR.)**	54	Tyler Gant (Jr.)
DT	95	Mason Mayne (Fr.)	88	Migo Jackson (Sr.)
DE	24	Jamaal Johnson* (Sr.)	44	Callen Campbell (So.)
LB	2	Kobie McKinzie* (Sr.)	34	Payton Roth (Jr.)
LB	33	**BRAYDON BRUS (SR.)**	42	Nigel Glover (Jr.)
CB	13	**JOSH FUSSELL (JR.)**	4	Montae Pate* (Sr.)
CB	7	Ore Adeyi (Sr.)	25	Marquet Dorsey Jr. (So.)
NB	9	**BRADEN TURNER (SR.)**	3	Brenden Deasfernandes* (Sr.)
S	6	**ROBERT FITZGERALD (SR.)**	0	Alijah Jones (So.)
S	21	Damon Walters (Jr.)	29	Jon Jon Stevens Jr. (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	90	Jackson Kleather* (Sr.)	KR	6	Joseph Himon II (Sr.)
P	92	Nikola Dugandzic (Fr.)	PR	19	Drew Wagner (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

DAVID BANKS-IMAGN IMAGES

JEREMIAH SMITH

SCOUTING THE BUCKEYES

"I thought the [defensive coordinator] Matt Patricia hire was awesome last year. What made them so good was they were super simple. They'd let you take something super short and run your base stuff, and then not budge to that. Then the second you get out of your stuff, they're ready for it. They were mentally tougher than you. ... It was so innovative what they did with their coordinators because in today's game, coordinators are being taken out of their college stuff. They thought, why not bring in two NFL guys [as coordinators] who might not — from the outside looking in — be known for their relatability to players and all that other BS who are just known for being schematic dudes that know what the f— they're doing from a scheme standpoint, and they've executed that really well."

— An opposing Big Ten assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (8)

WR	4	**JEREMIAH SMITH (JR.)**	7	Phillip Bell (Fr.)
WR	15	Chris Henry Jr. (Fr.)	5	Kyle Parker* (Jr.)
WR	1	**BRANDON INNISS (SR.)**	3	Devin McCuin* (Sr.)
LT	67	**AUSTIN SIEREVELD (JR.)**	77	Sam Greer (Fr.)
LG	51	**LUKE MONTGOMERY (SR.)**	76	Jake Cook (Fr.)
C	75	**CARSON HINZMAN (SR.)**	62	Joshua Padilla (Jr.)
RG	70	**PHILLIP DANIELS (JR.)**	58	Gabe VanSickle (So.)
RT	69	Ian Moore (So.)	74	Carter Lowe (Fr.)
TE	83	Nate Roberts (So.)	84	Hunter Welcing* (Sr.)
QB	10	**JULIAN SAYIN (SO.)**	9	Tavien St. Clair (Fr.)
RB	25	**BO JACKSON (SO.)**	32	Isaiah West (So.)

DEFENSE (3)

DE	2	**KENYATTA JACKSON JR. (SR.)**	12	Beau Atkinson (Sr.)
DT	96	Eddrick Houston (Jr.)	94	Jason Moore (Jr.)
DT	3	James Smith* (Sr.)	55	John Walker* (Jr.)
DE	9	Zion Grady (So.)	4	Qua Russaw* (Jr.)
MLB	26	Payton Pierce (Jr.)	20	Cincere Johnson (Fr.)
WLB	14	Christian Alliegro* (Sr.)	5	Riley Pettijohn (So.)
CB	7	**JERMAINE MATHEWS JR. (SR.)**	24	Dominick Kelly* (So.)
CB	6	Devin Sanchez (So.)	18	Cam Calhoun* (Jr.)
NB	1	Earl Little Jr.* (Sr.)	13	Miles Lockhart (So.)
SS	8	**JAYLEN MCCLAIN (JR.)**	16	Blaine Bradford (Fr.)
FS	11	Terry Moore* (Sr.)	10	Leroy Roker III (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	96	Connor Hawkins* (So.)	KR	2 Legend Bey (Fr.)
P	42	Joe McGuire (Jr.)	PR	1 Brandon Inniss (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

JEROME MIRON-IMAGN IMAGES

OHIO STATE BUCKEYES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 1 | BIG TEN PREDICTION: 1 | 2025 RECORD: 12-2, 9-0 BIG TEN

OFFENSE If Julian Sayin can remain efficient and further develop his game — perhaps with more bursts from the pocket — there's no reason why he can't be a Heisman Trophy contender once again. He looks to build on 3,610-yard, 32-touchdown season in which he completed an eye-popping 77% of his pass attempts.

Sayin still has plenty of firepower at his disposal, headlined, of course, by the beastly Jeremiah Smith and also featuring veteran Brandon Inniss and newcomer Chris Henry Jr.

Sayin also will have the benefit of a power-running game, which is a trademark of new offensive coordinator Arthur Smith. Running backs Bo Jackson and Isaiah West were borderline sensational last year and figure to help balance the attack while maneuvering behind an experienced offensive line. Four starters return up front, a group led by centerpiece Carson Hinzman and left tackle Austin Siereveld.

DEFENSE After guiding the nation's top stop unit last year, coordinator Matt Patricia has major holes to fill, including the loss of Arvell Reese, Sonny Styles and Caleb Downs, all top-seven overall NFL Draft picks. Still, there are athletes aplenty, and assistants Larry Johnson, James Laurinaitis and Tim Walton are all elite at developing their position groups.

The D-line will feature end Kenyatta Jackson Jr. and Alabama transfer James Smith, one of several large interior defenders with surprising lateral quickness and an ability to stuff the run. The linebacking corps will need to learn on the fly but already is showing promise.

In the secondary, Jermaine Matthews Jr. is welcoming his new role as the Buckeyes' top corner, while Duke transfer Terry Moore should emerge as a focal point at free safety.

SPECIALISTS Ill-timed missed kicks, lackluster punt returns and inconsistent kick coverage have haunted OSU over the years. Baylor transfer Connor Hawkins will try to steady the ship at placekicker. Meanwhile, Joe McGuire is back after averaging a middling 42.4 yards per punt last season. Inniss should feature as a top return option.

FINAL ANALYSIS Head coach Ryan Day is a proven survivor who has adapted well enough to scale the summit of modern college football. His new CEO-type approach should be empowering to Arthur Smith and Patricia, both former NFL head coaches. This staff will have to hustle to fine-tune a roster littered with a program-record 51 newcomers and a loaded schedule, but if the defense is able to reload, all championship possibilities are on the table.

2025 RESULTS (12-2, 9-0 BIG TEN)

Aug. 30	Texas	W	14-7
Sept. 6	Grambling	W	70-0
Sept. 13	Ohio	W	37-9
Sept. 27	at Washington	W	24-6
Oct. 4	Minnesota	W	42-3
Oct. 11	at Illinois	W	34-16
Oct. 18	at Wisconsin	W	34-0
Nov. 1	Penn State	W	38-14
Nov. 8	at Purdue	W	34-10
Nov. 15	UCLA	W	48-10
Nov. 22	Rutgers	W	42-9
Nov. 29	at Michigan	W	27-9
Dec. 6	vs. Indiana #	L	10-13
Dec. 31	vs. Miami (Fla.) %	L	14-24

#Indianapolis %Cotton Bowl: CFB Playoff Quarterfinal

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	Ball State
Sept. 12	at Texas
Sept. 19	Kent State
Sept. 26	Illinois
Oct. 3	at Iowa
Oct. 10	Maryland
Oct. 17	at Indiana
Oct. 31	at USC
Nov. 7	Oregon
Nov. 14	Northwestern
Nov. 21	at Nebraska
Nov. 28	Michigan

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Jay Timmons, CB	★★★★★
2.	Jerquaden Guilford, WR	★★★★★
3.	Khary Wilder, EDGE	★★★★★
4.	Cincere Johnson, LB	★★★★★
5.	Chris Henry Jr., WR	★★★★★
6.	Blaine Bradford, S	★★★★
7.	Sam Greer, OT	★★★★
8.	Jordan Thomas, CB	★★★★
9.	Braxton Rembert, LB	★★★★
10.	Damari Simeon, DL	★★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Ryan Day • Record at School: 82-12 (7+ years)
Career Record: 82-12 (7+ years) • Offensive Coordinators: Arthur Smith, Keenan Bailey • Defensive Coordinator: Matt Patricia
Location: Columbus, Ohio • Stadium: Ohio Stadium (102,780)

OREGON DUCKS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 6 | BIG TEN PREDICTION: 3 | 2025 RECORD: 13-2, 8-1 BIG TEN

OFFENSE The story of the offseason for Oregon was how many draftable Ducks opted to return in 2026, headlined by quarterback Dante Moore. The "thunder and lightning" duo of Jordon Davison and Dierre Hill Jr. combined for 1,323 rushing yards as freshman backups, and now they're the feature backs.

Receivers Dakorien Moore and Jeremiah McClellan are also stepping into bigger roles as sophomores; the X-factors there will be incoming UAB transfer Iverson Hooks and returner Evan Stewart, who has much to prove after a season lost to a knee injury. Kenyon Sadiq is gone at tight end, but there will be minimal drop-off to Jamari Johnson.

The Ducks hope the same can be said about the new-look line, led by another returner who spurned the NFL Draft — center Iapani Laloulu.

DEFENSE The entire starting defensive front is back after also opting to skip the 2026 draft and await 2027. With Bear Alexander and A'Mauri Washington plugging up the middle, and Matayo Uiagalelei and Teitum Tuioti manning the ends, this could be the best four-man front in the country. The Ducks added depth through the portal but also hope their own development of Aydin Breland, Matthew Johnson and Nasir Wyatt will pay dividends there.

Jerry Mixon leads the inside linebackers after a breakout 2025 season, and Devon Jackson brings elite athleticism to the position. Brandon Finney Jr. is one of the best young corners in the country, if not one of the best corners, period. The portal did bring help on the back end, in safety Koi Perich (Minnesota) and nickel Carl Williams IV (Baylor). Perich looks like a more than capable replacement for the departed Dillon Thieneman. Watch for a potential breakout season from corner Na'eem Offord.

SPECIALISTS The kicking game will be a question mark until proven otherwise, after the Ducks graduated their kicker and punter. When the placekicking unit takes the field, it's possible all three guys who touch the ball will be portal additions — long-snapper RJ Todd, punter/holder Bailey Ettridge and placekicker Keaton Emmett, who will look to beat out returners Gage Hurych and Rocco Graziano.

FINAL ANALYSIS Under head coach Dan Lanning, Oregon football is now recruiting and competing like one of the top five or 10 programs in the nation. There's one last hurdle to clear: bringing home the school's first national championship. With new coordinators on both sides of the ball, it's conceivable that there could be some early growing pains this fall. But with all the talent returning, the goal is crystal clear.

2025 RESULTS (13-2, 8-1 BIG TEN)

Aug. 30	Montana State	W	59-13
Sept. 6	Oklahoma State	W	69-3
Sept. 13	at Northwestern	W	34-14
Sept. 20	Oregon State	W	41-7
Sept. 27	at Penn State (ot)	W	30-24
Oct. 11	Indiana	L	20-30
Oct. 18	at Rutgers	W	56-10
Oct. 25	Wisconsin	W	21-7
Nov. 8	at Iowa	W	18-16
Nov. 14	Minnesota	W	42-13
Nov. 22	USC	W	42-27
Nov. 29	at Washington	W	26-14
Dec. 20	James Madison #	W	51-34
Jan. 1	vs. Texas Tech %	W	23-0
Jan. 9	vs. Indiana &	L	22-56

#CFB Playoff First Round %Orange Bowl: CFB Playoff Quarterfinal &Peach Bowl: CFB Playoff Semifinal

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	Boise State
Sept. 12	at Oklahoma State
Sept. 19	Portland State
Sept. 26	at USC
Oct. 10	UCLA
Oct. 17	Nebraska
Oct. 24	at Illinois
Oct. 31	Northwestern
Nov. 7	at Ohio State
Nov. 14	Michigan
Nov. 21	at Michigan State
Nov. 28	Washington

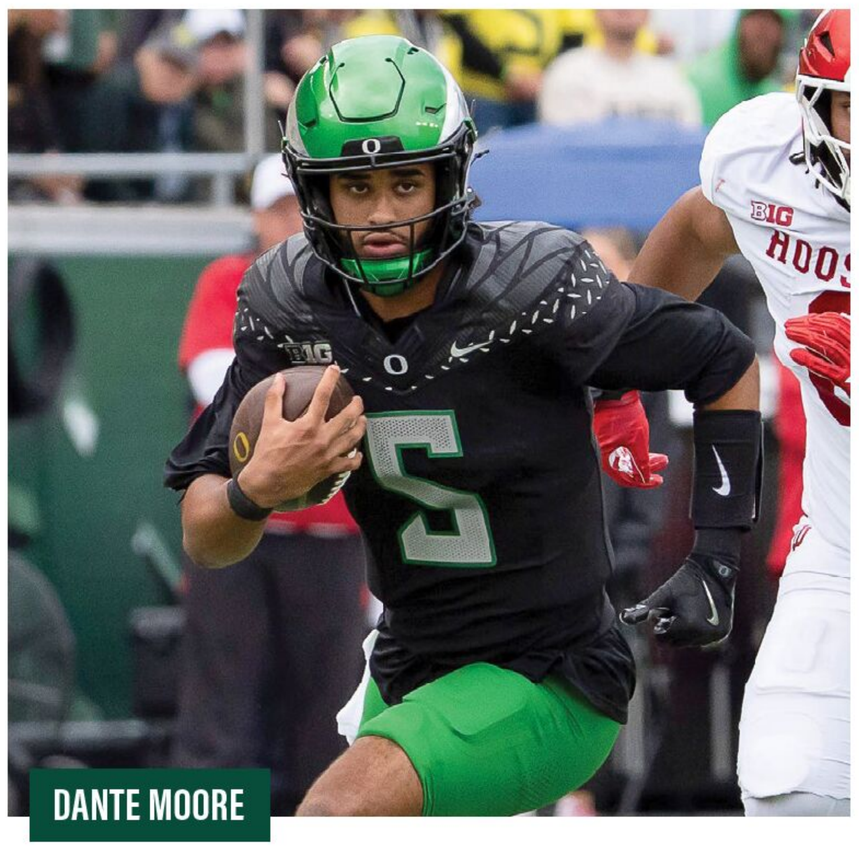
TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1. Jalen Lott, WR ★★★★★
2. Immanuel Iheanacho, OT ★★★★★
3. Tony Cumberland, DL ★★★★
4. Messiah Hampton, WR ★★★★
5. Kendre Harrison, TE ★★★★
6. Anthony Jones Jr., EDGE ★★★★
7. Devin Jackson, S ★★★★
8. Jett Washington, S ★★★★
9. Davon Benjamin, CB ★★★★
10. Tommy Tofi, IOL ★★★★

*Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Dan Lanning • Record at School: 48-8 (4 years)
Career Record: 48-8 (4 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Drew Mehringer
Defensive Coordinator: Chris Hampton • Location Eugene, Ore.
Stadium: Autzen Stadium (54,000)



DANTE MOORE

SCOUTING THE DUCKS

"That might be the best roster in college football, with the returners they have on the D-line and the back end, with the addition of Koi Perich from Minnesota — and then offensively, they basically return everyone but Malik Benson, Kenyon Sadiq and a couple running backs, but they played three running backs all year. They lose a couple O-linemen, but I think they feel fine about it. [Dante Moore] was the best quarterback we faced last year. ... With them, the key is going to be how their coordinators put their guys in position to make plays because at no point did I think what they did on defense was super complicated, but it was just so sound and everyone was doing their job at a high level. When you watch them on tape, they look like a team with a lot of 5-stars."

— An opposing Big Ten assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (7)

WR	1	**DAKORIEN MOORE (SO.)**	13	Gatlin Bair (Fr.)
WR	2	Iverson Hooks* (Sr.)		Jalen Lott (Fr.)
WR	3	**JEREMIAH MCCLELLAN (SO.)**	7	**EVAN STEWART (SR.)**
LT	59	Fox Crader (So.)	58	Ziyare Addison (Fr.)
LG	74	**DAVE IULI (SR.)**	73	Kawika Rogers (Sr.)
C	72	**IAPANI LALOULU (SR.)**	66	Bryce Boulton (Jr.)
RG	55	Douglas Utu (Fr.)	50	Demetri Manning (Fr.)
RT	75	Michael Bennett III* (Sr.)	78	Gernorris Wilson (Jr.)
TE	9	**JAMARI JOHNSON (JR.)**	18	Kendre Harrison (Fr.)
QB	5	**DANTE MOORE (JR.)**	8	Dylan Raiola* (Jr.)
RB	0	Jordon Davison (So.)	6	Dierre Hill Jr. (So.)

DEFENSE (8)

DE	10	**MATAYO UIAGALELEI (SR.)**	42	Aydin Breland (So.)
DT	1	**BEAR ALEXANDER (SR.)**	55	Matthew Johnson (Fr.)
DT	52	**A'MAURI WASHINGTON (SR.)**	0	D'Antre Robinson* (Jr.)
OLB	44	**TEITUM TUIOTI (SR.)**	31	Nasir Wyatt (So.)
ILB	6	**JERRY MIXON (SR.)**	13	Gavin Nix (Fr.)
ILB	9	Devon Jackson (Sr.)	23	Brayden Platt (So.)
CB	4	**BRANDON FINNEY JR. (SO.)**	14	Aaron Scott Jr.* (Jr.)
CB	7	**IFY OBIDEGWU (SO.)**	2	Na'eem Offord (So.)
NB	15	Carl Williams IV* (Jr.)	33	Zach Grisham (Sr.)
S	3	Koi Perich* (Jr.)	12	Peyton Woodyard (Jr.)
S	21	**AARON FLOWERS (SO.)**	8	Trey McNutt (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	97	Gage Hurych (So.)	KR	3	Koi Perich* (Jr.)
P	39	Bailey Ettridge* (So.)	PR	1	Dakorien Moore (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

BEN LONERGAN/THE REGISTER-GUARD

TONY ROJAS

MARK J. REBILAS-IMAGN IMAGES

SCOUTING THE NITTANY LIONS

"I don't necessarily know that they're gonna be immediately good in Year 1, but I thought the three big guys who followed [former defensive coordinator] Jim Knowles to Tennessee went for way more money than I would've paid them if I were Penn State. I thought they made a couple of really good adds. I also thought they kept a couple of really good players that could've left, like [linebacker] Tony Rojas. That's a really good player that probably could've gone anywhere for a lot more money than what he got at Penn State. ... I thought they did really well with their personnel. They obviously took a lot of Iowa State players. That made sense. They took pretty much that whole offensive staff and brought a lot of defensive players from Iowa State. That brings continuity throughout that roster."

— An opposing Big Ten assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (2)					
WR	0	Chase Sowell* (Sr.)	15	Keith Jones Jr.* (So.)
WR	4	Brett Eskildsen* (Jr.)	8	Karon Brookins* (Fr.)
WR	6	Koby Howard (So.)	2	Zay Robinson* (Fr.)
LT	78	Malachi Goodman (Fr.)	77	Owen Aliciene (Fr.)
LG	70	Trevor Buhr* (Jr.)	54	Vaea Ikakoula* (Fr.)
C	51	Brock Riker* (So.)	52	Dominic Rulli (Sr.)
RG	50	Cooper Cousins (Jr.)	79	Donnie Harbour (So.)
RT	**68**	**ANTHONY DONKOH (JR.)**	71	Garrett Sexton (So.)
TE	18	Benjamin Brahmer* (Sr.)	**87**	**ANDREW RAPPLEYEA (JR.)**
QB	3	Rocco Becht* (Sr.)	7	Alex Manske* (Fr.)
RB	21	Carson Hansen* (Sr.)	23	James Peoples* (Jr.)
DEFENSE (3)				
DE	33	Alexander McPherson* (So.)	99	Yvan Kemajou (So.)
DT	92	Siale Taupaki* (Sr.)	97	Keanu Williams* (Sr.)
DT	91	Armstrong Nnodim* (So.)	39	Ty Blanding (Jr.)
DE	88	Ikenna Ezeogu* (Sr.)	18	Max Granville (So.)
LB	**13**	**TONY ROJAS (JR.)**	25	Alex Tatsch (So.)
LB	10	Caleb Bacon* (Sr.)	9	Cael Brezina* (Jr.)
LB	8	Kooper Ebel* (Sr.)	26	Cam Smith (Fr.)
CB	**2**	**AUDAVION COLLINS (SR.)**	**7**	**ZION TRACY (SR.)**
CB	5	Daryus Dixson (So.)	23	Jahmir Joseph (Fr.)
S	31	Marcus Neal Jr.* (Jr.)	3	Jamison Patton* (Sr.)
S	4	Jeremiah Cooper* (Sr.)	21	Vaboue Toure (So.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	94	Ryan Barker (Jr.)	KR	25	Quinton Martin Jr. (So.)
P	38	Nathan Tiyce* (So.)	PR	6	Koby Howard (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

PENN STATE NITTANY LIONS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 18 | BIG TEN PREDICTION: 7 | 2025 RECORD: 7-6, 3-6 BIG TEN

OFFENSE New head coach Matt Campbell speaks fondly of his decade at Iowa State, so it's no surprise that six former Cyclones could start for the Nittany Lions, led by quarterback Rocco Becht. A three-year Iowa State starter, Becht is the most experienced FBS quarterback in college football, with 39 career starts, 26 wins and more than 2,500 snaps. He was limited during spring drills while rehabbing from offseason surgery to his non-throwing shoulder but threw in Beaver Stadium with a VR headset.

Becht brought his four favorite targets with him, notably 6-foot-7 tight end Benjamin Brahmer, who will continue the program's recent string of draft picks at the position. Carson Hansen, who rushed for 952 yards for the Cyclones last season, will share running back duties with Ohio State transfer James Peoples.

With four new starters, the offensive line needs a crash course in preseason camp. Still, offensive coordinator Taylor Mouser is comfortable throwing a lot of NFL concepts at the group.

DEFENSE Defensive coordinator D'Anton Lynn, an All-Big Ten cornerback at Penn State, returned to his alma mater after three seasons in Los Angeles (two at USC, one at UCLA). He signed four transfer tackles who weigh at least 319 pounds. The headliner is Siale Taupaki, who played for Lynn at UCLA and is entering his eighth season of college football.

By adding interior size, Lynn seeks to funnel plays to the linebackers. Campbell recruited three from Iowa State, notably Caleb Bacon and Kooper Ebel, who combined for 17.5 tackles for a loss last season. They'll work alongside Tony Rojas, Penn State's top returning defensive player, whose torn ACL before the UCLA game was a turning point.

In the secondary, Campbell has been particularly impressed with Zion Tracy, a Swiss Army knife who can play multiple spots. Former Iowa State safety Marcus Neal Jr. (11 TFLs in 2025) will captain the secondary.

SPECIALISTS Campbell was able to retain kicker Ryan Barker, who led the FBS in field-goal percentage (94.7) last season and didn't miss from inside 50 yards. Special teams coordinator Justin Lustig is back as well after a successful first season with the program.

FINAL ANALYSIS Penn State was fortunate Campbell was available in December. His first season will lean heavily in an Iowa State direction, with 24 of the team's 40 transfers coming from Ames. Becht is a gamer and has the tools to score points. Lynn is reworking a defense that was a huge disappointment last season but has cleaned up the majority of its issues.

Campbell is rebuilding Penn State for long-term viability. A College Football Playoff bid, while possible, would be overachieving this year.

2025 RESULTS (7-6, 3-6 BIG TEN)

Aug. 30	Nevada	W	46-11
Sept. 6	FIU	W	34-0
Sept. 13	Villanova	W	52-6
Sept. 27	Oregon (ot)	L	24-30
Oct. 4	at UCLA	L	37-42
Oct. 11	Northwestern	L	21-22
Oct. 18	at Iowa	L	24-25
Nov. 1	at Ohio State	L	14-38
Nov. 8	Indiana	L	24-27
Nov. 15	at Michigan State	W	28-10
Nov. 22	Nebraska	W	37-10
Nov. 29	at Rutgers	W	40-36
Dec. 27	vs. Clemson #	W	22-10

#Pinstripe Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	Marshall
Sept. 12	at Temple
Sept. 19	Buffalo
Sept. 26	Wisconsin
Oct. 3	at Northwestern
Oct. 10	USC
Oct. 17	at Michigan
Oct. 31	Purdue
Nov. 7	at Washington
Nov. 14	Minnesota
Nov. 21	Rutgers
Nov. 28	at Maryland

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Elijah Reeder, EDGE	★★★★
2.	Josiah Zayas, ATH	★★★★
3.	Jackson Ford, EDGE	★★★★
4.	Tyrell Chatman, CB	★★★★
5.	Peyton Falzone, QB	★★★
6.	Bryson Williams, S	★★★
7.	Mason Bandhauer, OT	★★★
8.	Amarion Jackson, WR	★★★
9.	Ben Whitver, WR	★★★
10.	D'Antae Sheffey, RB	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Matt Campbell • Record at School: First Season
Career Record: 107-70 (14+ years) • Offensive Coordinator: Taylor Mouser
Defensive Coordinator: D'Anton Lynn • Location: University Park, Pa.
Stadium: Beaver Stadium (106,304)

PURDUE BOILERMAKERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 85 | BIG TEN PREDICTION: 18 | 2025 RECORD: 2-10, 0-9 BIG TEN

OFFENSE Ryan Browne is back for Year 2 as QB1. He has bulked up to better withstand the rigors of the Big Ten. Browne can make all the throws and can tuck and run — but he needs to be better.

Is there an alpha wideout in the house? Hopes are high for four transfers and a juco. Drops were a big issue in 2025. Injuries have defined George Burhenn's career, but if he can stay healthy, the lithe tight end could be special.

The offensive line received an infusion of size and depth with the addition of six portal linemen. But the best of the blockers is holdover tackle Joey Tanona. It's hoped that a beefier line and new OL coach (Zach Crabtree) will pave the way for a promising collection of backs. Keep an eye on Minnesota transfer Fame Ijeboi and Texas transfer Jerrick Gibson.

DEFENSE It was a bit of a surprise when Purdue brought back Kevin Kane to reprise his role as defensive coordinator, a position he held for the Boilermakers for two disastrous years under former head coach Ryan Walters. Kane has a lot to prove for a defense that ranked 17th in the Big Ten in total defense last year and has allowed at least 30 points per game each of the past three seasons. The unquestioned leader: linebacker Charles Correa, the ultimate warrior.

Questions loom for a secondary that has six portal additions along with two juco transfers. Hudauri Hines and Don Saunders, a Utah transfer, should form a nice CB duo. Is there a pass-rusher in the house? All eyes are on Georgia transfer Elo Modozie and juco transfer Jeremy Lewis. The tackle tandem of TJ Lindsey and Ian Jeffries has potential.

SPECIALISTS Lots to sort out here. Purdue is auditioning kickers and punters, and fingers are crossed. Big things are expected from diminutive FCS Jackson State transfer Travis Terrell Jr. in the return game. He is quick and elusive. Purdue feels that special teams coach James Shibest gives them a schematic edge.

FINAL ANALYSIS Head coach Barry Odom couldn't stop the bleeding during his maiden voyage last year, when he went 2-10 (0-9 Big Ten). How bad have things been in West Lafayette? The program is riding an 18-game Big Ten losing streak and has gone 3-21 overall the past two seasons with no victories over Power 4 opponents. The last Big Ten win? It was in 2023. You get the picture. Odom has set his jaw and swears this will be a bowl team. An easier schedule will help. The hope is that the arrival of 29 portal players and four juco transfers brings instant results and improvement for a beleaguered program in the midst of its worst stretch in school history.

2025 RESULTS (2-10, 0-9 BIG TEN)

Aug. 30	Ball State	W	31-0
Sept. 6	Southern Illinois	W	34-17
Sept. 13	USC	L	17-33
Sept. 20	at Notre Dame	L	30-56
Oct. 4	Illinois	L	27-43
Oct. 11	at Minnesota	L	20-27
Oct. 18	at Northwestern	L	0-19
Oct. 25	Rutgers	L	24-27
Nov. 1	at Michigan	L	16-21
Nov. 8	Ohio State	L	10-34
Nov. 15	at Washington	L	13-49
Nov. 28	Indiana	L	3-56

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	Indiana State
Sept. 12	Wake Forest
Sept. 19	at UCLA
Sept. 26	Notre Dame
Oct. 3	at Illinois
Oct. 10	Minnesota
Oct. 17	Washington
Oct. 31	at Penn State
Nov. 7	Maryland
Nov. 14	at Iowa
Nov. 21	Wisconsin
Nov. 28	at Indiana

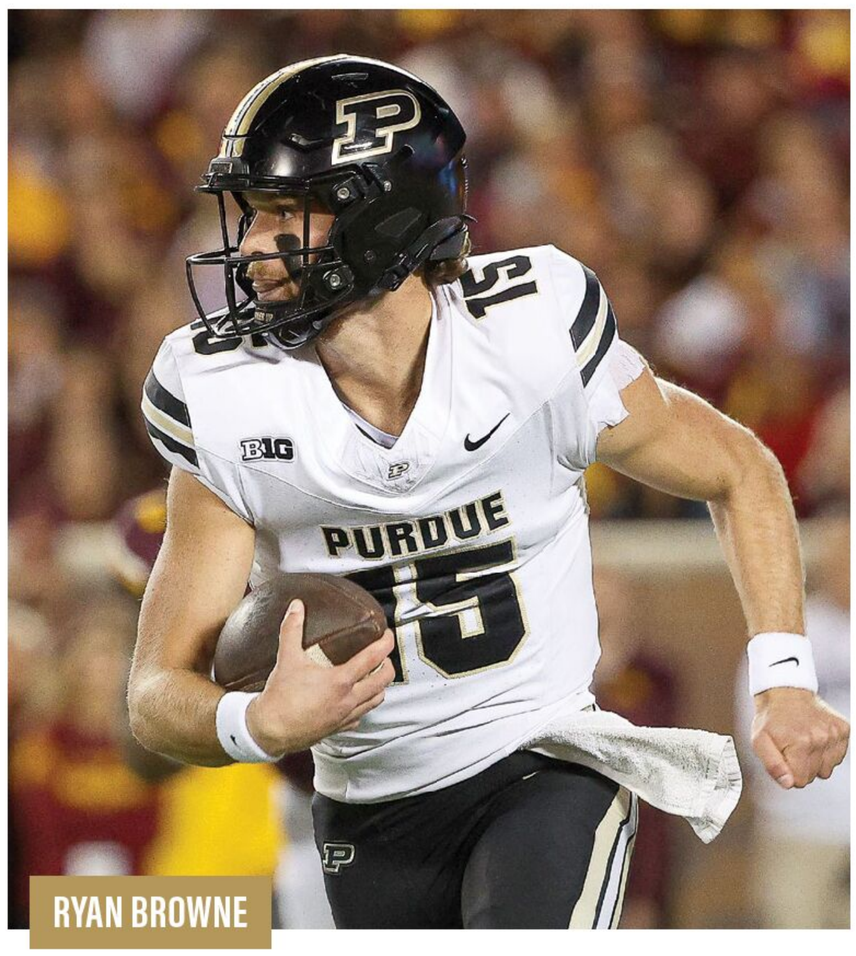
TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Josiah Hope, DL	★★★
2.	Izaiah Wright, RB	★★★
3.	Brock Brownfield, IOL	★★★
4.	Maximilian Carmicle, DL	★★★
5.	Jett Goldsberry, S	★★★
6.	Ar'Mari Towns, TE	★★★
7.	Katrell Webb, EDGE	★★★
8.	Raderrion Daniels, CB	★★★
9.	James Williams Jr., IOL	★★★
10.	Ricky Sampson, WR	★★★

**Per Rivals*

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Barry Odom • Record at School: 2-10 (1 year) • Career Record: 46-43 (7 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Josh Henson • Defensive Coordinator: Kevin Kane • Location: West Lafayette, Ind. • Stadium: Ross-Ade Stadium (61,441)



RYAN BROWNE

SCOUTING THE BOILERMAKERS

"Some continuity definitely helps [head coach] Barry Odom in Year 2. Truthfully, I wasn't incredibly impressed with what they brought in through the transfer portal. At Purdue, you have such an avenue to offer playing time to guys when other schools that you're gonna play against that aren't that much better than you can't do that. I don't think they took great advantage of that, but I definitely think they'll be better from a continuity standpoint. ... I really do think that they have a good coaching staff, but I'd be lying if I said that I was impressed with what they brought in through the portal."

— An opposing Big Ten assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (2)

WR	3	Xavier Townsend* (Sr.)	8	De'Nylon Morrissette (Sr.)
WR	19	Asaad Waseem* (Jr.)	10	Jesse Watson (So.)
WR		Bisi Owens* (Sr.)	80	Brandon Kinsey (Fr.)
LT	**79**	**JOEY TANONA (SR.)**	72	Jude McCoskey (Sr.)
LG	56	Marques Easley (So.)	55	Marc Nave Jr. (So.)
C	50	Boaz Stanley* (Sr.)	76	Ethan Trent (Jr.)
RG	59	Micah Banuelos* (Jr.)	73	Makai Saina* (So.)
RT	68	Nuku Mafi* (So.)	77	Jatavius Shivers* (Jr.)
TE	81	George Burhenn (Jr.)	16	Kylan Fox* (Jr.)
QB	**15**	**RYAN BROWNE (JR.)**	1	Evans Chuba (So.)
RB	2	Fame Ijeboi* (So.)	4	Jerrick Gibson* (So.)

DEFENSE (4)

DE	18	Elo Modozie* (Sr.)	33	Jeremy Lewis (Jr.)
DT	9	TJ Lindsey (So.)	92	Curt Neal* (Sr.)
DT	**40**	**IAN JEFFRIES (JR.)**	97	Wisdom Simms* (Sr.)
DE	23	Trey Smith (Jr.)	**8**	**CJ MADDEN (SR.)**
LB	**5**	**CHARLES CORREA (JR.)**	16	Anthony Speca* (Jr.)
LB	0	Jojo Hayden* (Jr.)	20	Winston Berglund (Jr.)
CB	**4**	**HUDAURI HINES (JR.)**	12	Ryan Turner (Sr.)
CB	7	Don Saunders* (Sr.)	29	Dee Newsome* (Jr.)
NB	1	Smiley Bradford (Jr.)	6	Mister Clark* (Jr.)
S	13	John Slaughter* (Sr.)	10	Ta'Vari Hampton (So.)
S	2	Jaden Mangham* (Sr.)	21	Justin Denson Jr.* (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	45	Seth Turner (Jr.)	KR	20	Travis Terrell Jr.* (Jr.)
P	42	Dylan Drennan* (So.)	PR	20	Travis Terrell Jr.* (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

MATT KROHN-IMAGN IMAGES

ANTWAN RAYMOND

SCOUTING THE SCARLET KNIGHTS

"I get the sense that the school thinks they're actually going to make this investment and give [head coach] Greg Schiano a chance to get it done because they have not done that yet. The people there know that he's basically been fighting that fight with a hand tied behind his back. ... Schiano is an excellent coach. He works incredibly hard. But at some point, it's a results business, so I would imagine that the rubber meets the road in the next year or so if they can't make a turn. But they were just not talented on defense last year. You turn on the tape, and they didn't have anybody that could do anything. That's a program problem. If you're in the Big Ten, and you're unable to recruit good players into your program, it's gonna be tough."

— An opposing Big Ten assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)				
WR	8	**KJ DUFF (JR.)**	5	Vernon Allen III (So.)
WR	2	Ben Black (Jr.)	1	Famah Toure (Sr.)
WR	0	Dyzier Carter (Fr.)	4	Jourdin Houston (So.)
LT	68	Ryder Langsdale (Sr.)	74	Moshood Giwa (Jr.)
LG	76	Dantae Chin (Jr.)	55	Nick Oliveira (Jr.)
C	53	Hank Zilinskas (Sr.)	57	Isaiah Cook* (Sr.)
RG	69	**KWABENA ASAMOAH (SR.)**	67	Chris Vigna (So.)
RT	56	**TYLER NEEDHAM (SR.)**	54	Everett Small* (Jr.)
TE	11	Logan Blake (Sr.)	88	Mike Higgins (Sr.)
QB	10	AJ Surace (So.)	12	Dylan Lonergan* (Jr.)
RB	3	**ANTWAN RAYMOND (JR.)**	9	Clay Thevenin* (Sr.)
DEFENSE (4)				
DE	11	Malachi Davis* (Sr.)	90	Farell Gnago (Jr.)
DT	99	Rondo Porter* (Jr.)	55	**ZAIRE ANGOY (SR.)**
DT	0	Doug Blue-Eli (Sr.)	96	Keshon Griffin (Sr.)
DE	94	J'Dan Burnett* (Sr.)	8	Wydeek Collier-Johnson (Fr.)
LB	2	**MOSES WALKER (SR.)**	10	Ty Morris* (Sr.)
LB	6	**ABRAM WRIGHT (SR.)**	13	DJ McClary (So.)
CB	12	Zahmir Dawud* (Sr.)	22	Michael Clayton (So.)
CB	4	Kevyn Humes* (Jr.)	5	Bradlee Jones* (Sr.)
NB	7	Kevin Levy (Jr.)	27	Sage Clawges (Sr.)
S	9	DK Gilley (Jr.)	16	Jesse Ofurie (Sr.)
S	1	**KAJ SANDERS (JR.)**	20	Chris Joines (Sr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	44	Jai Patel (Sr.)	KR	2 Ben Black (Jr.)
P	94	Jakob Anderson (Jr.)	PR	2 Ben Black (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

NICK WOSIKA-IMAGN IMAGES

RUTGERS SCARLET KNIGHTS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 69 | BIG TEN PREDICTION: 16 | 2025 RECORD: 5-7, 2-7 BIG TEN

OFFENSE Rutgers must replace starting quarterback Athan Kaliakmanis, who exhausted his eligibility after two of the best years at the position in program history. The Scarlet Knights will choose between rising redshirt sophomore AJ Surace, who was Kaliakmanis' backup for two years, and Boston College transfer Dylan Lonergan, a former 4-star recruit who was handpicked by Nick Saban at Alabama.

The Scarlet Knights retained their top two stars in running back Antwan Raymond and wide receiver KJ Duff, who should be one of the best players in the Big Ten this season, but they lost depth at wide receiver with Ian Strong's transfer to Cal and DT Sheffield's graduation. Competition for the two spots behind Duff should be strong among a number of returnees and talented incoming freshmen.

The offensive line is in flux, with starters Gus Zilinskas (center) and Bryan Felter (left guard) having graduated. Kwabena Asamoah is a lock to start at right guard, but the two tackle spots and left guard were wide open in the spring. New offensive line coach Jim Turner, who replaces two-time Super Bowl champion Pat Flaherty, has a lot to sort out.

DEFENSE Looking to upgrade the worst Rutgers defense in the Big Ten era, head coach Greg Schiano revamped his coaching staff, firing co-coordinators Robb Smith and Zach Sparber and replacing them with FCS South Dakota head coach Travis Johansen. Johansen then hired a number of familiar faces from his lower-level stops to fill out the rest of his staff.

There will be multiple key position battles. Cornerback should be the "most competitive" of the bunch, per Schiano, as all three starting spots will feature new faces. Rutgers will look to strengthen its interior line with the return of Doug Blue-Eli, who missed last season with injury, and coaches hope that one of the defensive end transfers could be the first Scarlet Knight to collect five sacks in a season in a decade.

SPECIALISTS Rutgers is returning its starting kicker (Jai Patel), punter (Jakob Anderson) and long-snapper (Michael O'Connor) from a unit that was solid last season. The Scarlet Knights fair-catch a majority of punts and kick returns, but they remain very aggressive in trying to block kicks.

FINAL ANALYSIS Rutgers brought back two of the best offensive weapons in the Big Ten, has depth at wide receiver and should be better defensively than last year's debacle. But between replacing one of their greatest quarterbacks ever, the many unknowns on defense and a lot of movement on the offensive line, there are enough question marks to make earning a bowl bid — the minimum expectation for the Scarlet Knights in Year 7 of Schiano's second stint at the school — far from a guarantee.

2025 RESULTS (5-7, 2-7 BIG TEN)

Aug. 28	Ohio	W	34-31
Sept. 6	Miami (Ohio)	W	45-17
Sept. 13	Norfolk State	W	60-10
Sept. 19	Iowa	L	28-38
Sept. 27	at Minnesota	L	28-31
Oct. 10	at Washington	L	19-38
Oct. 18	Oregon	L	10-56
Oct. 25	at Purdue	W	27-24
Nov. 1	at Illinois	L	13-35
Nov. 8	Maryland	W	35-20
Nov. 22	at Ohio State	L	9-42
Nov. 29	Penn State	L	36-40

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 3	UMass
Sept. 11	at Boston College
Sept. 19	USC
Sept. 26	Howard
Oct. 3	Indiana
Oct. 17	at Maryland
Oct. 24	at Northwestern
Oct. 31	Michigan
Nov. 7	at Wisconsin
Nov. 14	Nebraska
Nov. 21	at Penn State
Nov. 28	Michigan State

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Devonte Anderson, CB	★★★★
2.	Rinaldo Callaway III, EDGE	★★★★
3.	Logan Anthony, IOL	★★★★
4.	Messiah Tilson, S	★★★
5.	Reece Beck, EDGE	★★★
6.	Brandon Murray, CB	★★★
7.	Xavier Stearn, QB	★★★
8.	Jared Smith, IOL	★★★
9.	Dyzier Carter, WR	★★★
10.	JJ Conyers, CB	★★★

**Per Rivals*

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Greg Schiano • Record at School: 99-108 (17 years) • Career Record: 99-108 (17 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Kirk Ciarrocca • Defensive Coordinator: Travis Johansen • Location: New Brunswick, N.J. • Stadium: SHI Stadium (52,454)

UCLA BRUINS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 43 | BIG TEN PREDICTION: 12 | 2025 RECORD: 3-9, 3-6 BIG TEN

OFFENSE UCLA has a new head coach (Bob Chesney) and an influx of transfers but a returning quarterback in Nico Iamaleava, who has made big portal news before but chose to stay in Westwood. Iamaleava struggled at times during his UCLA transition but also displayed immense talent and completed 64.4% of passes while adding 505 rushing yards.

"He's not timid, he's not afraid, he's not sitting back there wondering what to do," Chesney says. "He has a good grasp of the offense. He's very capable physically. He loves this game, and he's not humble out there."

Iamaleava will throw to a transfer-heavy receiver group with speed and a willingness to block. San José State transfer Leland Smith and Landon Ellis, who joined Chesney from James Madison, should lead the group alongside Power 4 transfers Brian Rowe (South Carolina) and Semaj Morgan (Michigan).

Running back projects well with Wayne Knight, a star at JMU, joining returnee Anthony Woods. UCLA will need a transfer tight end to emerge. The offensive line features portal pickups like tackle Jordan Davis (South Alabama) and guard Riley Robell (James Madison) as well as a key returnee in guard Eugene Brooks.

DEFENSE The secondary is the unit's strength, as safety Cole Martin, cornerback Rodrick Pleasant and nickel Scooter Jackson return. They will be joined by potential impact transfers like Utah safety Tao Johnson, whom Chesney calls "a phenomenal football player," and James Madison nickel DJ Barksdale.

The Bruins have an intriguing linebacker tandem in returnee Jalen Woods and Oklahoma transfer Samuel Omosigho, who had 50 tackles and two sacks last season. "A really commanding presence," Chesney says.

The defensive line is almost completely new. Sun Belt Freshman of the Year Sahir West and Aiden Gobaira both made the move out West from James Madison. Power 4 imports like Darold DeNgohe (Rutgers), Tyson Ford (Cal) and Maxwell Roy (Ohio State) will be in the rotation.

SPECIALISTS Placekicker Mateen Bhaghani has connected on 83% of his career field-goal attempts, including 39-of-45 inside 50 yards. UCLA added transfer punter Curtis Gerrand, who averaged 43 yards for Sam Houston last season. Knight averaged 9.5 yards per punt return in 2025.

FINAL ANALYSIS Chesney enters the Big Ten with a largely overhauled roster, and UCLA needs the new pieces to click — especially along both lines and at receiver. The Bruins begin with challenging nonleague games against Cal and San Diego State, but their conference slate isn't particularly grueling until November. The JMU transfers and Iamaleava create a chance for Year 1 success.

2025 RESULTS (3-9, 3-6 BIG TEN)

Aug. 30	Utah	L	10-43
Sept. 6	at UNLV	L	23-30
Sept. 12	New Mexico	L	10-35
Sept. 27	at Northwestern	L	14-17
Oct. 4	Penn State	W	42-37
Oct. 11	at Michigan State	W	38-13
Oct. 18	Maryland	W	20-17
Oct. 25	at Indiana	L	6-56
Nov. 8	Nebraska	L	21-28
Nov. 15	at Ohio State	L	10-48
Nov. 22	Washington	L	14-48
Nov. 29	at USC	L	10-29

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	at Cal
Sept. 12	San Diego State
Sept. 19	Purdue
Sept. 26	at Maryland
Oct. 10	at Oregon
Oct. 17	Wisconsin
Oct. 24	Michigan State
Oct. 31	Nevada
Nov. 7	at Minnesota
Nov. 14	Illinois
Nov. 21	at Michigan
Nov. 28	USC

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1. Quinn Buckey, OT ★★★★
2. Kenneth Moore III, WR ★★★
3. James Moffat, DL ★★★
4. Cooper Javorsky, IOL ★★★
5. Jayden Fox, RB ★★★
6. Camden Jensen, TE ★★★
7. DJ Bordeaux, QB ★★★
8. Logan Hirou, S ★★★
9. Mike McDonald, IOL ★★★
10. Zaheer Young, OT ★★★

**Per Rivals*

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Bob Chesney • Record at School: First Season • Career Record: 132-52 (16 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Dean Kennedy • Defensive Coordinator: Colin Hitschler • Location: Los Angeles, Calif. • Stadium: Rose Bowl (89,702)

NICO IAMALEAVA

SCOUTING THE BRUINS

"If I was going to defend [QB Nico Iamaleava], I would do some things to stop him from running and make him throw the ball — particularly downfield. He's a playmaker. But without his feet and without his ability to scramble, I'm not sure that he can sit in the pocket and carve you up. It'll be interesting to see what the NFL guys think of him. He's a good player and can take a hit, but he just didn't seem like he could kill you with his arm. … I was blown away with what their NIL budget was a few years ago. It was unfathomably low. I don't know if they've gotten that ramped up. … I've heard they've been kind of arrogant on the road with following the [Curt] Cignetti model. Like, 'Look who we are,' instead of saying, 'We're gonna do this the right way.' I'm interested to see how [new head coach Bob Chesney] does, though."

— An opposing Big Ten assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)				
WR	0	Leland Smith* (Sr.)	1	Aidan Mizell* (Jr.)
WR	2	Brian Rowe* (So.)	7	Mikey Matthews (Sr.)
WR	11	Landon Ellis* (Sr.)	4	Semaj Morgan* (Sr.)
LT	68	Jordan Davis* (Sr.)	76	Mack Indestad* (Sr.)
LG	**55**	**EUGENE BROOKS (SO.)**	74	Julian Armella (Sr.)
C	**64**	**SAM YOON (SR.)**	54	Derek Osman* (Sr.)
RG	52	Carter Sweazie* (Sr.)	51	Riley Robell* (Jr.)
RT	65	Hall Schmidt* (Sr.)	78	Mike McDonald* (So.)
TE	85	Brayden Loftin* (Sr.)	89	Josh Phifer* (Jr.)
QB	**9**	**NICO IAMALEAVA (JR.)**	10	Madden Iamaleava (Fr.)
RB	3	Wayne Knight* (Sr.)	6	Anthony Woods (Sr.)
DEFENSE (3)				
DE	15	Sahir West* (So.)	33	Dallin Havea* (So.)
DT	92	Darold DeNgohe* (Sr.)	55	AJ Fuimaono (Jr.)
DT	99	Maxwell Roy* (Fr.)	95	Tyson Ford* (Jr.)
DE	97	Aiden Gobaira* (Sr.)	19	Ryan McCulloch* (Jr.)
LB	9	Jalen Woods (Sr.)	0	Donavyn Pellot (Fr.)
LB	10	Samuel Omosigho* (Sr.)	56	Drew Spinogatti* (Sr.)
CB	3	Robert Stafford III (Jr.)	21	Dante Lovett* (Jr.)
CB	**2**	**RODRICK PLEASANT (JR.)**	18	Osiris Gilbert* (So.)
NB	**1**	**SCOOTER JACKSON (SR.)**	32	DJ Barksdale* (Sr.)
S	**4**	**COLE MARTIN (SR.)**	27	Ta'Shawn James* (Jr.)
S	6	Tao Johnson* (Sr.)	12	Malik Hartford* (Jr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	15	Mateen Bhaghani (Sr.)	KR 7	Mikey Matthews (Sr.)
P	35	Curtis Gerrand* (So.)	PR 3	Wayne Knight* (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

KIRBY LEE-IMAGN IMAGES

JAYDEN MAIAVA

GARY A. VASQUEZ-IMAGN IMAGES

SCOUTING THE TROJANS

"The defensive questions are very much there, but they're also recruiting to the point where it wouldn't surprise me to see those questions answered. They have enough talent to be real competitors in the conference. That's the beauty of the Big Ten. You can be fifth and be on the borderline to make the playoff. It wouldn't surprise me if they did that. If I were setting the odds, I would view it as damn near 50-50 as to whether they're gonna get to the playoff. ... They recruited really, really well on both lines of scrimmage the last couple classes. At the high school level, they're hoarding a lot of the big bodies. They may have a freshman or two start on the offensive line with how they recruited, and then a player like [defensive lineman] Jahkeem Stewart is one of the more unbelievable guys you'll scout."

— An opposing Big Ten assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (9)

WR	**16**	**TANOOK HINES (SO.)**	17	Kayden Dixon-Wyatt (Fr.)
WR	9	Terrell Anderson* (Jr.)	18	Romero Ison (Fr.)
WR	0	Zacharyus Williams (So.)	10	Corey Simms (So.)
LT	**72**	**ELIJAH PAIGE (JR.)**	79	Elijah Vaikona (Fr.)
LG	**73**	**TOBIAS RAYMOND (JR.)**	68	Hayden Treter (So.)
C	**67**	**KILIAN O'CONNOR (SR.)**	52	Willi Wascher (Fr.)
RG	**77**	**ALANI NOA (SR.)**	60	Kaylon Miller (So.)
RT	**74**	**JUSTIN TAUANUU (SO.)**	71	Keenyi Pepe (Fr.)
TE	87	Josiah Jefferson (Jr.)	19	Mark Bowman (Fr.)
QB	**14**	**JAYDEN MAIAVA (SR.)**	7	Sam Huard (Sr.)
RB	**2**	**WAYMOND JORDAN (SR.)**	**8**	**KING MILLER (SO.)**

DEFENSE (5)

DE	10	Braylan Shelby (Sr.)	18	Zuriah Fisher* (Sr.)
DT	**97**	**JIDE ABASIRI (JR.)**	88	Floyd Boucard (So.)
DT	4	Jahkeem Stewart (So.)	99	Jamaal Jarrett (Jr.)
DE	**1**	**KAMERYN CRAWFORD (JR.)**	94	Luke Wafle (Fr.)
LB	17	Deven Bryant* (Jr.)	15	Jadyn Walker (So.)
LB	**8**	**DESMAN STEPHENS II (JR.)**	26	Elijah Newby (So.)
CB	0	Jontez Williams* (Sr.)	16	Prophet Brown (Sr.)
CB	**25**	**MARCELLES WILLIAMS (SO.)**	27	Chasen Johnson (So.)
NB	7	Alex Graham (Fr.)	2	Elbert Hill IV (Fr.)
S	**6**	**CHRISTIAN PIERCE (SR.)**	30	Marquis Gallegos (So.)
S	9	Kennedy Urlacher (Jr.)	38	Isaiah Rubin (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	48	Ryon Sayeri (So.)	**KR**	16	Tanook Hines (So.)
P	35	Lachlan Carrigan* (So.)	**PR**	4	Trent Mosley (Fr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

USC TROJANS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 14 | BIG TEN PREDICTION: 5 | 2025 RECORD: 9-4, 7-2 BIG TEN

OFFENSE USC returns one of the nation's most efficient quarterbacks in Jayden Maiava, an offensive line loaded with experience and a gifted running back tandem in Waymond Jordan and King Miller, who combined to average 6.3 yards per rush in 2025. All five starters up front return, anchored by tackles Elijah Paige and Justin Tauanuu, as USC seeks continued improvement in the run game.

"If we can keep these guys healthy, this group will have the opportunity to be the most dominant that we've had," head coach Lincoln Riley says of his O-line. "Closing out those tough road games and winning these championship games, that's the next step. A lot of that will lean on our line and on our backs."

Maiava finished fifth nationally in passing yards (3,711) and second in QBR (89.9) last season. He will throw to a mostly different group, as USC loses Biletnikoff Award winner Makai Lemon, All-Big Ten tight end Lake McRee and wideout J'Kobi Lane. USC brings back Tanook Hines, adds NC State transfer Terrell Anderson and welcomes in decorated recruits like receiver Boobie Feaster and tight end Mark Bowman.

DEFENSE Hall of Famer Gary Patterson, the former head coach at TCU, takes over a defense with elevated expectations, especially with increased depth up front. USC's defensive line was the group that Riley said had the furthest to go when he arrived. The front now features greater depth at both spots with players like ends Braylan Shelby and Kameryn Crawford, tackles Jide Abasiri and Jahkeem Stewart and transfers like end Zuriah Fisher (Penn State). Riley also likes the depth at cornerback, where Marcelles Williams is back, Prophet Brown and Chasen Johnson return from injury and transfer Jontez Williams (Iowa State) arrives.

The Trojans must replace All-America safety Bishop Fitzgerald but return Christian Pierce, nickel Alex Graham and others.

SPECIALISTS New special teams coordinator Mike Ekeler arrives from Nebraska to oversee a group that returns standout kicker Ryon Sayeri while adding Memphis transfer Lachlan Carrigan at punter. Lemon also handled most of the returns, so Hines, Trent Mosley and others figure to be bigger factors in that department.

FINAL ANALYSIS The Trojans' roster is less plug-and-play and more homegrown, bolstered by line depth, talented backs, a potentially elite quarterback in Maiava and an influx from one of the nation's top recruiting classes, which is comprised of players who will contribute without being totally relied upon. "The roster has improved drastically in the last couple of years," Riley says. "It's primed to take that next step."

2025 RESULTS (9-4, 7-2 BIG TEN)

Aug. 30	Missouri State	W	73-13
Sept. 6	Georgia Southern	W	59-20
Sept. 13	at Purdue	W	33-17
Sept. 20	Michigan State	W	45-31
Sept. 27	at Illinois	L	32-34
Oct. 11	Michigan	W	31-13
Oct. 18	at Notre Dame	L	24-34
Nov. 1	at Nebraska	W	21-17
Nov. 7	Northwestern	W	38-17
Nov. 15	Iowa	W	26-21
Nov. 22	at Oregon	L	27-42
Nov. 29	UCLA	W	29-10
Dec. 30	vs. TCU # (ot)	L	27-30
			#Alamo Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Aug. 29	San José State
Sept. 5	Fresno State
Sept. 12	Louisiana
Sept. 19	at Rutgers
Sept. 26	Oregon
Oct. 3	Washington
Oct. 10	at Penn State
Oct. 24	at Wisconsin
Oct. 31	Ohio State
Nov. 14	at Indiana
Nov. 21	Maryland
Nov. 28	at UCLA

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Luke Wafle, EDGE	★★★★★
2.	Jaimeon Winfield, DL	★★★★★
3.	Kayden Dixon-Wyatt, WR	★★★★
4.	Mark Bowman, TE	★★★★
5.	Vlad Dyakonov, OT	★★★★
6.	Boobie Feaster, WR	★★★★
7.	Elbert Hill IV, CB	★★★★
8.	Deshonne Redeaux, RB	★★★★
9.	Shahn Alston, RB	★★★★
10.	Talanoa Ili, LB	★★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Lincoln Riley • Record at School: 35-18 (4 years)
Career Record: 90-28 (9 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Luke Huard
Defensive Coordinator: Gary Patterson • Location: Los Angeles, Calif.
Stadium: Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum (77,500)

WASHINGTON HUSKIES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 17 | BIG TEN PREDICTION: 6 | 2025 RECORD: 9-4, 5-4 BIG TEN

OFFENSE Washington took a massive step forward on offense in 2025, rocketing up the ranks of the Big Ten to No. 4 in scoring offense (34.1 points per game) and No. 5 in total offense (409.9 yards per game). With junior quarterback Demond Williams Jr. back in the fold after his brief flirtation with the transfer portal, head coach Jedd Fisch is looking for his unit to take another step forward.

However, Williams is going to have to do it without his best weapons. Wide receiver Denzel Boston and running back Jonah Coleman departed for the NFL Draft, as did left tackle Carver Willis, while running back Adam Mohammed and wide receiver Raiden Vines-Bright both hit the portal. But with four starters returning along the offensive line, Washington is very confident after reeling in the highest-rated recruiting class in school history.

The Huskies are projecting big roles for 4-star recruits Jordan Clay, Mason James and Trez Davis at wide receiver, while running back Brian Bonner Jr. is expected to be part of the rotation at an inexperienced position. Left tackle Kodi Greene, a 5-star recruit, is expected to start right away and give the offense a boost.

DEFENSE Defensive coordinator Ryan Walters has similar expectations for the youth on his defense, which includes an overhaul of the defensive line. Led by junior Elinneus Davis, 4-star freshman Derek Colman-Brusa and a trio of transfers in DeSean Watts, Darin Conley and Kai McClendon, the line should be stout against the run and in rushing the passer.

The Huskies can also boast one of the nation's best linebacking corps, including seniors Jacob Manu and Xe'ree Alexander and sophomore Zaydrius Rainey-Sale. The secondary features All-Big Ten honorable mention selection Alex McLaughlin and Freshman All-American Rylon Dillard-Allen at safety, and cornerbacks Emmanuel Karnley, a Virginia transfer, and sophomore Dylan Robinson, who has "first-round traits" according to the staff.

SPECIALISTS Coordinator Chris Petrilli added second-team All-Sun Belt kicker Tyler Robles, who converted on 91.3% of his field goals (21-for-23) at Texas State. Washington needed to upgrade at punter and landed one of the nation's best in Hunter Green from San Diego State, who ranked No. 6 in the nation in average yards per punt last season at 47.0.

FINAL ANALYSIS The schedule includes a few tough road trips — USC, Nebraska, Oregon — but if Williams can take a step forward after struggles in the big moments last year, Washington should be able to get to 10 wins and potentially knock on the door of the College Football Playoff.

2025 RESULTS (9-4, 5-4 BIG TEN)

Aug. 30	Colorado State	W	38-21
Sept. 6	UC Davis	W	70-10
Sept. 20	at Washington State	W	59-24
Sept. 27	Ohio State	L	6-24
Oct. 4	at Maryland	W	24-20
Oct. 10	Rutgers	W	38-19
Oct. 18	at Michigan	L	7-24
Oct. 25	Illinois	W	42-25
Nov. 8	at Wisconsin	L	10-13
Nov. 15	Purdue	W	49-13
Nov. 22	at UCLA	W	48-14
Nov. 29	Oregon	L	14-26
Dec. 13	vs. Boise State #	W	38-10

#LA Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	Washington State
Sept. 12	Utah State
Sept. 19	E. Washington
Sept. 26	Minnesota
Oct. 3	at USC
Oct. 10	Iowa
Oct. 17	at Purdue
Oct. 31	at Nebraska
Nov. 7	Penn State
Nov. 14	at Michigan State
Nov. 21	Indiana
Nov. 28	at Oregon

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Kodi Greene, OT	★★★★
2.	Rahsjon Duncan, CB	★★★★
3.	Brian Bonner Jr., RB	★★★★
4.	JD Hill, DL	★★★★
5.	Derek Colman-Brusa, DL	★★★★
6.	Trez Davis, WR	★★★★
7.	Ramzak Fruean, LB	★★★★
8.	Gavin Day, S	★★★★
9.	Mason James, WR	★★★
10.	Jordan Clay, WR	★★★

*Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Jedd Fisch • Record at School: 15-11 (2 years)
Career Record: 32-33 (5+ years) • Offensive Coordinator: Jedd Fisch
Defensive Coordinator: Ryan Walters • Location: Seattle, Wash.
Stadium: Husky Stadium (70,083)

DEMOND WILLIAMS JR.

SCOUTING THE HUSKIES

"They can recruit better at the high school level, which would help them get there. I almost see them in the same light as Minnesota. They're not a dark horse, but they'll be a top-half team. I definitely think talent is a part of that. ... It was assumed that [quarterback Demond Williams Jr.] was going to LSU when he entered the transfer portal. You got the sense pretty early on that after LSU missed out on [Cincinnati transfer quarterback Brendan Sorsby], they were pretty desperate. But it wouldn't have made a lot of sense for [Williams] to leave Washington, and once it came out that his agency cut ties with him because of it, there was no way that was gonna happen."

— An opposing Big Ten assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (7)

WR	5	Christian Moss* (Sr.)	11	Jordan Clay (Fr.)
WR	**2**	**DEZMEN ROEBUCK (SO.)**	6	Mason James (Fr.)
WR	3	Rashid Williams (Jr.)	8	Chris Lawson (So.)
LT	76	Kodi Greene (Fr.)	55	Kolt Dieterich* (Jr.)
LG	**72**	**JOHN MILLS (SO.)**	78	Jake Flores (Fr.)
C	**66**	**LANDEN HATCHETT (SR.)**	**56**	**GEIREAN HATCHETT (SR.)**
RG	73	Champ Taulealea (Fr.)	75	Lowen Colman-Brusa (Fr.)
RT	**74**	**DREW AZZOPARDI (SR.)**	68	Soane Faasolo (Jr.)
TE	**86**	**DECKER DEGRAAF (JR.)**	85	Baron Naone (So.)
QB	**1**	**DEMOND WILLIAMS JR. (JR.)**	10	Treston McMillan (Fr.)
RB	4	Jordan Washington (So.)	17	Jayden Limar* (Sr.)

DEFENSE (4)

DT	5	Derek Colman-Brusa (Fr.)	58	DeSean Watts* (Jr.)
DT	**90**	**ELINNEUS DAVIS (JR.)**	33	Darin Conley* (Jr.)
OLB	12	Logan George* (Jr.)	52	Devin Hyde (So.)
ILB	23	Zaydrius Rainey-Sale (So.)	10	Xe'ree Alexander (Sr.)
ILB	9	Jacob Manu (Sr.)	**0**	**TAARIQ AL-UQDAH (JR.)**
OLB	**48**	**JACOB LANE (SR.)**	99	Russell Davis II (Sr.)
HUSKY	2	Rahshawn Clark (So.)	16	Ramonz Adams Jr. (Fr.)
CB	8	Emmanuel Karnley* (Jr.)		Rahsjon Duncan (Fr.)
CB	6	Dylan Robinson (So.)	24	Jeron Jones (Fr.)
S	**7**	**ALEX MCLAUGHLIN (SR.)**	4	CJ Christian (Sr.)
S	3	Rylon Dillard-Allen (So.)	21	Gavin Day (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	95	Tyler Robles* (Jr.)	KR	4	Jordan Washington (So.)
P	93	Hunter Green* (Sr.)	PR	2	Rahshawn Clark (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

JAYNE KAMIN-ONCEA-IMAGN IMAGES

MASON POSA

SCOUTING THE BADGERS

"They scored 81 points in nine conference games. I don't care who your quarterback is. That speaks to a lot of bigger issues than just the quarterback position. There are teams in the conference who could not throw a single pass and score more than nine points per game. It also speaks to, defensively, your ability to make turnovers, and special teams, your ability to make kicks. I thought it was a whole package thing. ... Truthfully, I was surprised that both Wisconsin and Maryland decided to run it back with their head coaches. I wasn't really impressed with either one of those teams. It almost felt like they didn't really know who the next guy was gonna be, so they decided they'd rather have a year to prepare a move like that."

— An opposing Big Ten assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)

WR	2	**CHRIS BROOKS JR. (SR.)**	7	Shamar Rigby* (Jr.)
WR	9	Jaylon Domingeaux* (Sr.)	16	Malachi Coleman* (Jr.)
WR	0	Tyrell Henry (Sr.)	13	Eugene Hilton Jr. (So.)
LT	71	PJ Wilkins* (Jr.)	72	Lucas Simmons-Johansson* (Jr.)
LG	78	**COLIN CUBBERLY (SO.)**	50	Ryan Cory (So.)
C	51	Austin Kawecki* (Sr.)	76	Stylz Blackmon* (Jr.)
RG	75	**EMERSON MANDELL (SO.)**	73	Blake Cherry* (So.)
RT	55	Kevin Heywood (So.)	60	Nolan Davenport (Fr.)
TE	82	Emmett Bork (Fr.)	89	Jacob Harris* (Jr.)
QB	1	Colton Joseph* (Jr.)	8	Deuce Adams* (So.)
RB	3	Abu Sama III* (Sr.)	6	Darrion Dupree (Jr.)

DEFENSE (3)

DE	30	Charles Perkins (Sr.)	99	Junior Poyser* (Jr.)
DT	91	Hammond Russell IV* (Sr.)	92	Nolan Vils (Jr.)
SLB	15	Sebastian Cheeks (Sr.)	12	Nicolas Clayton (So.)
ILB	44	**COOPER CATALANO (SO.)**	19	Thomas Heiberger (So.)
ILB	8	**MASON POSA (SO.)**	28	Jon Jon Kamara* (So.)
JACK	7	Tyrese Fearbry (Sr.)	51	Micheal Garner (Sr.)
CB	2	Javan Robinson* (Sr.)	1	Eric Fletcher Jr.* (So.)
CB	24	Jai'mier Scott (Fr.)	3	Cai Bates* (So.)
NB	5	Bryce West* (So.)	27	Raphael Dunn (So.)
SS	29	**MATTHEW JUNG (SR.)**	13	Matthew Traynor (Jr.)
FS	4	Marvin Burks Jr.* (Sr.)	21	Cairo Skanes (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	97	Gavin Lahm (Sr.)	KR	0 Tyrell Henry (Sr.)
P	91	Sean West (So.)	PR	0 Tyrell Henry (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

JOVANNY HERNANDEZ / MILWAUKEE JOURNAL SENTINEL

WISCONSIN BADGERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 55 | BIG TEN PREDICTION: 13 | 2025 RECORD: 4-8, 2-7 BIG TEN

OFFENSE The Badgers are pinning their hopes on a transfer quarterback for the fourth consecutive season under head coach Luke Fickell. Former Old Dominion QB and Sun Belt Offensive Player of the Year Colton Joseph will take over with the hope that his rushing ability and downfield passing will inject Wisconsin's offense with much-needed explosiveness. Wisconsin finished last season with the worst passing offense and the worst scoring offense in the Power 4 and failed to generate shots down the field. Joseph excelled at such plays at ODU and is expected to take advantage of play-action snaps that create one-on-one situations for receivers.

Every position on the offense got a facelift through the transfer portal, most notably the offensive line, a group that has failed to be the program's calling card of late as it was in the past. Former Iowa State running back Abu Sama III and USC back Bryan Jackson II arrived to bolster a backfield that fell apart down the stretch of 2025. Joseph had more runs of 10 or more yards (37) than Wisconsin did as a team (33) last season.

DEFENSE Linebackers Cooper Catalano and Mason Posa were major retention wins for the Badgers after the pair emerged as freshmen to lead the defense. Wisconsin recruited multiple inside linebackers to ensure it could deploy Posa as a pass-rusher and in other situational roles to get him near the ball as often as possible.

Transfer cornerbacks Cai Bates, Eric Fletcher Jr., Javan Robinson and Bryce West all figure to be major pieces, and Missouri transfer Marvin Burks Jr. gives the safety group the experience it lacked. There's more depth in this unit than there has been throughout Fickell's tenure.

This unit's success may come down to the progression of homegrown edge defenders such as Nicolas Clayton and Jaylen Williams. If they elevate the rush behind senior Sebastian Cheeks, the Badgers figure to build upon a surprisingly good front last season.

SPECIALISTS Placekicker Gavin Lahm redshirted last season in order to be eligible this season. He's shown a big leg as a kickoff specialist. Wisconsin hired a full-time special teams coordinator for the first time under Fickell, poaching veteran Bob Ligashesky from Minnesota. More coaching investment in the third phase should help a group that routinely uses starters on special teams. One area that must improve is punt returns. Wisconsin averaged 7.8 yards on 12 punt returns last season, opting for fair catches more often than not.

FINAL ANALYSIS The schedule breaks more favorably for Wisconsin this year than last, but there are too many new, unproven faces in key positions to predict a major turnaround for a program stuck in a rut. A better record should be in store, but the Badgers aren't yet contenders in the Big Ten.

2025 RESULTS (4-8, 2-7 BIG TEN)

Aug. 28	Miami (Ohio)	W	17-0
Sept. 6	Middle Tennessee	W	42-10
Sept. 13	at Alabama	L	14-38
Sept. 20	Maryland	L	10-27
Oct. 4	at Michigan	L	10-24
Oct. 11	Iowa	L	0-37
Oct. 18	Ohio State	L	0-34
Oct. 25	at Oregon	L	7-21
Nov. 8	Washington	W	13-10
Nov. 15	at Indiana	L	7-31
Nov. 22	Illinois	W	27-10
Nov. 29	at Minnesota	L	7-17

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 6	vs. Notre Dame #
Sept. 12	Western Illinois
Sept. 19	Eastern Michigan
Sept. 26	at Penn State
Oct. 3	Michigan State
Oct. 17	at UCLA
Oct. 24	USC
Oct. 31	at Iowa
Nov. 7	Rutgers
Nov. 14	at Maryland
Nov. 21	at Purdue
Nov. 28	Minnesota

#Green Bay, WI

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Brady Bekkenhuis, IOL	★★★★
2.	Qwantavius Wiggins, RB	★★★★
3.	Keeyshawn Tabuteau, WR	★★★
4.	Djidjou Bah, DL	★★★
5.	Carsen Eloms, CB	★★★
6.	Jack Sievers, TE	★★★
7.	Ryan Hopkins, QB	★★★
8.	Yahya Gaad, EDGE	★★★
9.	Donovan Dunmore, CB	★★★
10.	Zion Legree, ATH	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Luke Fickell • Record at School: 17-21 (3+ years) • Career Record: 80-46 (10+ years) • Offensive Coordinator: Jeff Grimes • Defensive Coordinator: Mike Tressel • Location: Madison, Wis. • Stadium: Camp Randall Stadium (76,057)

C-USA CUSA PREVIEW

PREDICTED ORDER OF FINISH

1. **WKU** HILLTOPPERS
2. **LIBERTY** FLAMES
3. **KENNESAW STATE** OWLS
4. **JACKSONVILLE STATE** GAMECOCKS
5. **DELAWARE** BLUE HENS
6. **FIU** PANTHERS
7. **MISSOURI STATE** BEARS
8. **NEW MEXICO STATE** AGGIES
9. **MIDDLE TENNESSEE** BLUE RAIDERS
10. **SAM HOUSTON** BEARKATS

CUSA CHAMPIONSHIP

WKU OVER LIBERTY

JOIN COLLEGE FOOTBALL EXPERT STEVEN LASSAN AT ATHLONSPORTS.COM FOR A LOOK AT SECOND- AND THIRD-TEAM SELECTIONS

ALL-CUSA TEAM

FIRST-TEAM OFFENSE

QB	NICK MINICUCCI	Delaware
RB	JO SILVER	Delaware
RB	ANTHONY CARRIE	FIU
AP	JMARIYAE ROBINSON	Missouri State
WR	K.D. HUTCHINSON	WKU
WR	SEAN WILSON	Delaware
WR	DEONDRE JOHNSON	Jacksonville State
TE	JERON ASKREN	Missouri State
C	STEVEN DEMBOSKI	Delaware
OL	AARON FENIMORE	Liberty
OL	LUCAS MRACHKOVSKIY	Jacksonville State
OL	D.J. GETH	Liberty
OL	MATEO GUEVARA	Kennesaw State

FIRST-TEAM DEFENSE

DL	KENTON SIMMONS	FIU
DL	MIKE JARVIS	Liberty
DL	MARCUS PATTERSON	Kennesaw State
DL	JAWAUN CAMPBELL	Jacksonville State
LB	MAC SANDERS	Jacksonville State
LB	BARON HOPSON	Kennesaw State
LB	WALKER O'STEEN	Jacksonville State
LB	GAVIN MOUL	Delaware
DB	TRE'QUON FEGANS	Jacksonville State
DB	SHAMIR STERLIN	FIU
DB	CALEB NIX	Jacksonville State
DB	KT SEAY	Delaware

FIRST-TEAM SPECIALISTS

K	GARRISON RIPPA	Jacksonville State
P	ASHTON LOGAN	Middle Tennessee
KR	TIM BURNS JR.	Sam Houston
PR	MAGUIRE ANDERSON	FIU

BOWL PROJECTIONS

Salute to Veterans: Delaware vs. Georgia Southern

68 Ventures: Jacksonville State vs. Arkansas State

New Orleans: WKU vs. James Madison

Myrtle Beach: Liberty vs. Marshall

Independence: Kennesaw State vs. West Virginia

COORDINATOR CAROUSEL

DELAWARE
Defense: New: Manny Rojas, Rocco DiMeco; Old: Manny Rojas

JACKSONVILLE STATE
Offense: New: Taylor Housewright
Old: Clint Trickett

NEWLAND ISAAC, LIBERTY

LIBERTY
Offense: New: Newland Isaac
Old: Willy Korn, Newland Isaac
Defense: New: Shawn Quinn
Old: Skylor Magee, Kyle Krantz

MIDDLE TENNESSEE
Offense: New: Anthony Scelfo
Old: Bodie Reeder

MISSOURI STATE
Offense: New: Mark Cala
Old: Nick Petrino
Defense: New: Jack Curtis
Old: L.D. Scott

WKU
Offense: New: Bodie Reeder, Joe Bernardi; Old: Rick Bowie
Defense: New: Davis Merritt
Old: Da'Von Brown, Davis Merritt

NICK MINICUCCI, DELAWARE

K.D. HUTCHINSON, WKU

TOP TRANSFERS

	NAME	POS.	NEW SCHOOL	FORMER SCHOOL
1.	**JJ Kohl**	QB	FIU	Appalachian State
	Kohl is a former blue-chip recruit with a big arm who came on strong late last season.			
2.	**Deshawn Purdie**	QB	Liberty	Wake Forest
	Now on his third school, Purdie has Power 4 experience and a knack for big plays.			
3.	**Rickie Collins**	QB	Kennesaw State	Syracuse
	Collins struggled in his first starting stint but could catch on with the Owls.			
4.	**Makai Jackson**	WR	Liberty	Indiana
	Jackson is a downfield threat who previously earned All-Sun Belt honors.			
5.	**Kam Davis**	RB	Liberty	Florida State
	Davis has the talent to be the Flames' next 1,000-yard rusher.			
6.	**James Jones**	RB	New Mexico State	Delaware State
	James is a home-run hitter who averaged just under 10 yards per carry last season.			
7.	**Triston Morgan**	RB	Kennesaw State	Benedict
	Morgan is making the jump from DII to DI on the heels of a breakout season.			
8.	**Nigel Johnson**	WR	WKU	South Carolina State
	Johnson brings field-stretching ability to round out the Hilltoppers' receiver room.			
9.	**Trey Hedden**	QB	New Mexico State	Furman
	A two-year starter for Furman, Hedden was among the most accurate QBs in the FCS.			
10.	**Henry Belin IV**	QB	Missouri State	Duke
	Belin has Power 4 starting experience and profiles as a dual-threat for the Bears.			

RECRUITING RANKINGS BY SCHOOL

1. WKU (74)
2. Jacksonville State (84)
3. FIU (101)
4. Delaware (112)
5. Liberty (118)
6. Middle Tennessee (120)
7. Sam Houston (122)
8. Kennesaw State (129)
9. Missouri State (130)
10. New Mexico State (139)

Rankings per Rivals; National ranking in parentheses

GAMES TO WATCH

Sept. 5	Liberty at James Madison
Oct. 2	Liberty at Delaware
Oct. 7	Jacksonville St. at Kennesaw St.
Oct. 13	FIU at Jacksonville State
Oct. 21	Liberty at Kennesaw State
Nov. 7	WKU at Middle Tennessee
Nov. 7	Delaware at Kennesaw State
Nov. 14	Jacksonville State at WKU
Nov. 14	FIU at Delaware
Nov. 21	WKU at Liberty
Nov. 28	Kennesaw State at WKU
Nov. 28	Jacksonville State at Delaware

TOP 10 RECRUITS

	NAME	POS.	SCHOOL	RATING	NAT. RANK
1.	Ryan Mallory	LB	Sam Houston	★★★	893
2.	Jaeden McMillan	WR	FIU	★★★	968
3.	Dominic Turnbull	CB	FIU	★★★	1,095
4.	Ellis Alloway	LB	Liberty	★★★	1,110
5.	Devin Hamilton	WR	WKU	★★★	1,130
6.	Tristan Lyles	EDGE	Jacksonville St.	★★★	1,152
7.	Bryson Maddox	WR	MTSU	★★★	1,156
8.	Jakobe Dejesus	WR	Liberty	★★★	1,216
9.	Malcolm Gaston	IOL	Liberty	★★★	1,237
10.	Xavier Rucker	RB	New Mexico St.	★★★	1,258

Rankings per Rivals industry ranking;

FROM LEFT: MARK J. REBILAS-USA TODAY SPORTS; WILLIAM BRETZGER-DELAWARE NEWS JOURNAL; STEPHEN LEW-IMAGN IMAGES

DELAWARE BLUE HENS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 107 | CUSA PREDICTION: 5 | 2025 RECORD: 7-6, 4-4 CUSA

OFFENSE In their first year at the FBS level, the Blue Hens led Conference USA in total offense and passing offense and were second in points per game in 2025. Quarterback Nick Minicucci successfully orchestrated head coach Ryan Carty's spread offense, and he returns after earning second-team All-CUSA status and leading the league in passing yards (3,683) and total offense (3,918). He also rushed for 10 TDs.

The Blue Hens did lose the two best players on their offensive front with Fintan Brose's graduation and Anwar O'neal's transfer to Louisville. But all-league center Steven Demboski is a solid anchor for what should still be a strong offensive line.

The Blue Hens return their top four rushers, led by Jo Silver, while adding a versatile transfer in Kaderris Roberts from Bowling Green. Leading receiver Sean Wilson (68 catches for 877 yards and three TDs) is also back, along with the reliable Donovan Lewis, speedy Nick Tyree and several promising transfer additions.

DEFENSE Delaware ranked among CUSA's worst in points, total yards and passing yards allowed last year. The Hens were way too susceptible to allowing explosive third- and fourth-down plays and aim to improve in that area this year, as well as in forcing turnovers.

In safety KT Seay, a first-team All-CUSA choice, they return their best defensive player, one who can cover ground and deliver a hit or snare a takeaway. Inside linebacker Gavin Moul, third in CUSA in tackles last year, is also a proven stopper.

Up front, Delaware will be looking for Noah Matthews, in his second UD season, to exhibit the playmaking ability that landed him at Kentucky to start his college career. Cornerback Jamarion Kolagbodi was the secondary's most accomplished freshman last year, and the Hens will look for contributions from newcomers such as George Mullins from Michigan State and Jaquise Alexander from North Dakota State.

SPECIALISTS Second-team All-CUSA kicker Nate Reed will be tough to replace, with Div. III Salisbury transfer Tucker Smack and freshman Kason Mullis competing for that key role. Punter Josh Cupitt returns after missing 2025 with a knee injury and has proven reliable in the past. Delaware has a slew of potentially explosive return candidates.

FINAL ANALYSIS Delaware was better than most expected while going 4-4 in Conference USA and 7-6 overall in its debut FBS season, capped by its 20-13 68 Ventures Bowl win over Louisiana. Now eligible for the first time to play for the Conference USA title, Delaware — and its ardent followers — will expect to be in championship contention this year.

2025 RESULTS (7-6, 4-4 CUSA)

Aug. 28	Delaware State	W	35-17
Sept. 6	at Colorado	L	7-31
Sept. 13	UConn (ot)	W	44-41
Sept. 20	at FIU	W	38-16
Oct. 3	WKU	L	24-27
Oct. 15	at Jacksonville State	L	25-38
Oct. 22	Middle Tennessee	W	31-28
Nov. 1	at Liberty	L	30-59
Nov. 8	Louisiana Tech	W	25-24
Nov. 15	at Sam Houston	L	23-26
Nov. 22	at Wake Forest	L	14-52
Nov. 29	UTEP	W	61-31
Dec. 17	vs. Louisiana #	W	20-13

#68 Ventures Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 3	Merrimack
Sept. 12	at Vanderbilt
Sept. 19	Coastal Carolina
Sept. 26	at Virginia
Oct. 2	Liberty
Oct. 13	at Middle Tenn.
Oct. 20	Missouri State
Oct. 27	at WKU
Nov. 7	at Kennesaw State
Nov. 14	FIU
Nov. 21	at New Mexico State
Nov. 28	Jacksonville State

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Carson Griffin, ATH	★★★
2.	Tyler Bell, QB	★★★
3.	Trenton Gummer, CB	★★★
4.	Cristian Alvarez, IOL	★★★
5.	Jaiden Edwards, IOL	★★★
6.	Tae'Sean Robinson, WR	★★★
7.	Kevin Moore, S	★★★
8.	Dannell Jester, S	★★★
9.	Dorian Rutledge, S	★★★
10.	Demarco Daniels, LB	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Ryan Carty • Record at School: 33-17 (4 years)
Career Record: 33-17 (4 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Terence Archer
Defensive Coordinators: Manny Rojas, Rocco DiMeco
Location: Newark, Del. • Stadium: Delaware Stadium (18,500)

NICK MINICUCCI

SCOUTING THE BLUE HENS

"What stands out to me is that they return pretty much their whole team. They were fortunate enough to keep three or four of their starting O-linemen, a couple of their receivers, their quarterback, both running backs — even defensively, they were able to keep most of that unit, then they went and added really good players in the portal. ... I think that they're the team to beat in our conference. Just what they were able to do offensively and defensively in that transition to our conference, keeping that team together for a second year, I think they're gonna be a really frickin' good football team. They've got some money to work with, but I just think it goes back to the buy-in from that team. They've got a bunch of guys who put their heart and soul into it."

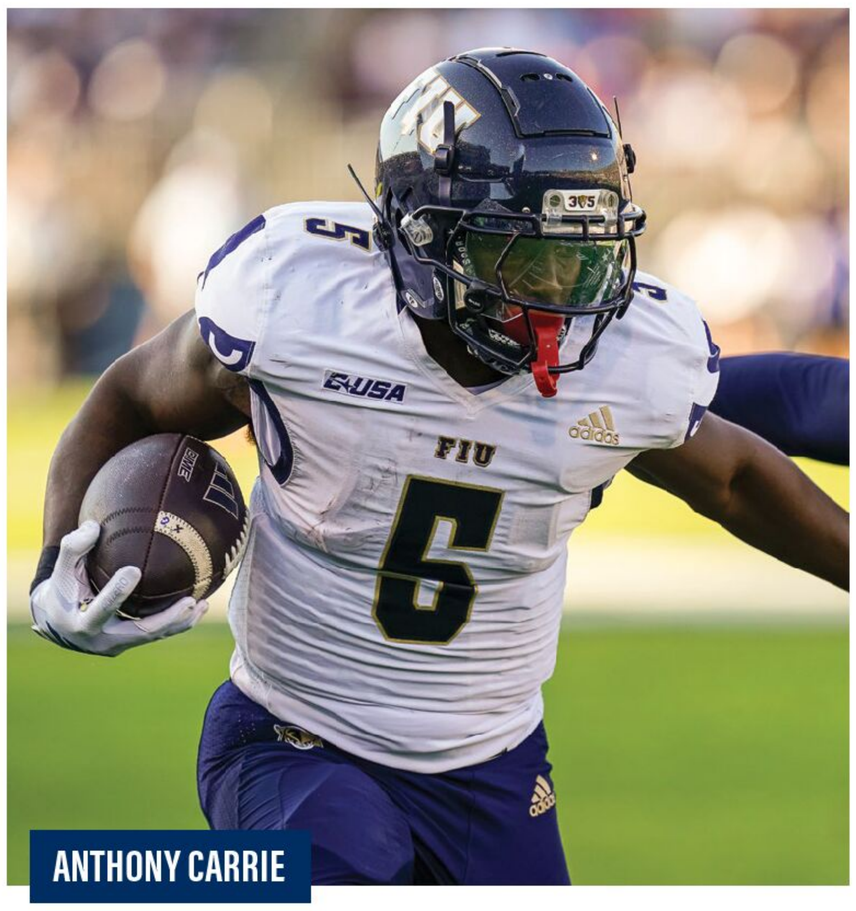
— An opposing CUSA assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (7)				
WR	18	**SEAN WILSON (SO.)**	0	Bryson Graves* (Jr.)
WR	6	Nick Tyree (So.)	1	Brandon Rehmann (So.)
WR	14	Donovan Lewis (Jr.)	17	Emmanuel Doku (Fr.)
LT	75	**NOAH ROSAHAC (SO.)**	65	Wahkeem Roman (Sr.)
LG	67	Mustafa Feika* (Jr.)	74	Tyler Burnham (So.)
C	61	**STEVEN DEMBOSKI (SR.)**	59	Patrick Methlie (Sr.)
RG	51	Chandler Telfaire (Fr.)	78	Bentley Allen II (Fr.)
RT	62	**ANTHONY CACCESE (JR.)**	60	Carter Sareyka (So.)
TE	88	**ELIJAH SESSOMS (SR.)**	40	Scott Moore (Fr.)
QB	4	**NICK MINICUCCI (JR.)**	16	Braden Streeter (So.)
RB	27	**JO SILVER (SR.)**	21	Viron Ellison Jr. (So.)
DEFENSE (5)				
DL	13	**NOAH MATTHEWS (SR.)**	0	Q'yaeir Price (Sr.)
DL	52	Dominick Brogna (Sr.)	33	Trace Scott III (So.)
DL	44	Kaeden Singleton (So.)	89	Nate Ray (Jr.)
LB	9	Colin Gallagher (So.)	46	Julius Puryear (Fr.)
MLB	35	**GAVIN MOUL (JR.)**	11	Jawarren Corbin (Jr.)
LB	10	**BLAKE MATTHEWS (SR.)**	20	Jalen Bell* (Jr.)
CB	18	Jamarion Kolagbodi (Fr.)	24	Jalen Ross (Fr.)
CB	6	**KSHAWN COX JR. (JR.)**	8	Jaquise Alexander* (Jr.)
S	7	**KT SEAY (JR.)**	27	AJ Graham (Fr.)
S	2	Kahlil Ali (Jr.)	36	Nasir Eatmon (Fr.)
S	29	George Mullins* (Fr.)	16	Noah Jefferson (Fr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	31	Tucker Smack* (Jr.)	KR	1 Brandon Rehmann (So.)
P	39	Josh Cupitt (Sr.)	PR	0 Bryson Graves* (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

WILLIAM BRETZGER-DELAWARE NEWS JOURNAL



ANTHONY CARRIE

DAVID BUTLER II-IMAGN IMAGES

SCOUTING THE PANTHERS

"They've got two guys who played behind [2025 leading rusher Kejon Owens] and played a decent amount last year who should be able to step in. They've got Anthony Carrie, who transferred last year from Georgia Tech. He's a solid football player. ... Those dudes play hard as s—. They're athletic. They're Florida creatures, as we call them. They're just long, big-bodied people. Those dudes are hard to get around. Those defensive backs are super long, so they're hard to win against. I think that they're going to be really good under [head coach] Willie Simmons. He's done a damn good job recruiting and building up that team so far."

— An opposing CUSA assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (1)

WR	2	Maguire Anderson (Jr.)	8	Greg Gaines III* (Sr.)
WR	0	Jojo Stone (So.)	13	Tyson Carter (So.)
WR	7	**KYLE MCNEAL (JR.)**	6	Eric Nelson (So.)
LT	50	Jeremy Smith (Fr.)	58	Oscar Colon* (Sr.)
LG	71	Antonio Tripp Jr. (Jr.)	56	Marc Michel Jr. (Fr.)
C	55	Daveion Harley* (Jr.)	67	Jon Rodriguez (So.)
RG	54	Zaire Flournoy (Sr.)	73	Spencer Webb (Sr.)
RT	51	Manasseh Ripert* (Sr.)	58	Oscar Colon* (Sr.)
TE	88	Kevin Schaeffer* (Sr.)	9	Jackson Verdugo (So.)
QB	17	JJ Kohl* (Jr.)	11	Zach Marker* (Sr.)
RB	1	Anthony Carrie (Jr.)	3	Devonte Lyons (So.)

DEFENSE (3)

DE	5	**KENTON SIMMONS (SR.)**	14	Robert Williams (So.)
DT	99	Germaine Carter (Jr.)	88	Elijah Simmons* (Sr.)
DT	15	Nathan Jennings* (Fr.)	12	RJ Moss Jr.* (So.)
DE	13	Dante Anderson (Sr.)	45	Lamont Green Jr. (Jr.)
MLB	9	**JOSIAH TAYLOR (JR.)**	22	Brayshawn Littlejohn* (Jr.)
WLB	11	Percy Courtney Jr. (Sr.)	18	JaCorey "Pickle" Stewart* (So.)
CB	0	Da'Vontae Floyd* (So.)	6	Lawrence Johnson* (Jr.)
CB	7	Jai-Ayviauynn Celestine (Sr.)	8	Ryan Gadson* (Jr.)
NB	2	DeAndre Boykins* (Sr.)	21	Karaijus Hayes (Fr.)
S	3	Demetrius Hill (Sr.)	4	Wesley Miller* (Sr.)
S	1	**SHAMIR STERLIN (SO.)**	27	Eric Johnson (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	48	Robert Czeremcha (So.)	KR	3 Devonte Lyons (So.)
P	41	Stone Springman (Jr.)	PR	2 Maguire Anderson (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

FIU PANTHERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 112 | CUSA PREDICTION: 6 | 2025 RECORD: 7-6, 5-3 CUSA

OFFENSE The Panthers have undergone a lot of turnover. Quarterback Keyone Jenkins left for UCF via the transfer portal, and head coach Willie Simmons replaced Jenkins with transfer JJ Kohl. At 6-foot-7 and 250 pounds, Kohl is larger than most quarterbacks, and he is coming off a solid 2025 performance at Appalachian State, completing 61.6% of his passes for 1,465 yards, 12 touchdowns and only two interceptions.

Kejon Owens departed for the pro ranks following a 1,300-yard season, but the Panthers return their No. 2 rusher, Anthony Carrie (469 yards, five touchdowns last year). FIU also returns wide receivers Kyle McNeal, Maguire Anderson and Jojo Stone, and the Panthers added Greg Gaines III, a 1,000-yard receiver at FCS Rhode Island.

FIU lost all five offensive line starters and will rely on returnees Zaire Flournoy and Antonio Tripp Jr. to anchor the unit.

DEFENSE Defensive end Kenton Simmons returns after a strong 2025 campaign in which he posted eight tackles for a loss and six sacks, earning second-team All-CUSA honors. Dante Anderson, who had three sacks last season, also returns to the edge. Germaine Carter, who had 19 tackles and 1.5 sacks, will play a key role at defensive tackle, and West Virginia transfer Elijah Simmons will factor in as well.

Sophomore middle linebacker Josiah Taylor is the leading returning tackler, having racked up 76 stops with 6.5 for a loss and two sacks in 2025. Percy Courtney Jr. returns as the weakside linebacker after finishing third on the team with seven tackles for a loss.

Defensive back Shamir Sterlin, a Freshman All-CUSA performer last year, returns after making 65 tackles. The secondary also boasts safety Demetrius Hill, nickel DeAndre Boykins and corners Da'Vontae Floyd, Jai-Ayviauynn Celestine and Lawrence Johnson.

SPECIALISTS Robert Czeremcha is poised to take over placekicking duties after making 2-of-3 attempts last year. Former Miami (Fla.) transfer Stone Springman is slated to be the punter, and Devonte Lyons and Maguire Anderson will be the main return men. Anderson had a 97-yard punt-return touchdown against UTSA in the First Responder Bowl.

FINAL ANALYSIS FIU took a big step forward in its first year with Simmons at the helm, notching the program's first winning season since 2018 and first bowl appearance since 2019, boosting the team's confidence and proving to the players that the Panthers can taste success. But the departure of several key contributors due to graduation or transfer means that the Panthers will have to rely on newcomers to keep the program moving in the right direction.

2025 RESULTS (7-6, 5-3 CUSA)

Aug. 29	Bethune-Cookman	W	42-9
Sept. 6	at Penn State	L	0-34
Sept. 13	Florida Atlantic	W	38-28
Sept. 20	Delaware	L	16-38
Oct. 4	at UConn	L	10-51
Oct. 14	at WKU	W	25-6
Oct. 21	Kennesaw State	L	26-45
Oct. 29	at Missouri State	L	21-28
Nov. 8	at Middle Tennessee	W	56-30
Nov. 15	Liberty (ot)	W	34-27
Nov. 22	Jacksonville State	W	27-21
Nov. 29	at Sam Houston	W	56-16
Dec. 26	vs. UTSA #	L	20-57

#First Responder Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	at South Florida
Sept. 12	Buffalo
Sept. 19	at Florida Atlantic
Sept. 26	Long Island
Oct. 7	New Mexico State
Oct. 13	at Jacksonville State
Oct. 20	Middle Tennessee
Oct. 31	at Liberty
Nov. 7	Missouri State
Nov. 14	at Delaware
Nov. 21	at Kennesaw State
Nov. 28	Sam Houston

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Dominic Turnbull, CB	★★★
2.	Jaeden McMillan, WR	★★★
3.	James Resar, TE	★★★
4.	Karaijus Hayes, S	★★★
5.	Malik Penson, WR	★★★
6.	Michael Smarts, EDGE	★★★
7.	Barrett Schulz, WR	★★★
8.	Zay West, CB	★★★
9.	Riley Wilson, OT	★★★
10.	Justin Compere, RB	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Willie Simmons • Record at School: 7-6 (1 year)
Career Record: 73-30 (9 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Nick Coleman
Defensive Coordinator: Jovan Dewitt • Location: University Park, Fla.
Stadium: Pitbull Stadium (20,000)

JACKSONVILLE STATE GAMECOCKS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 106 | CUSA PREDICTION: 4 | 2025 RECORD: 9-5, 7-1 CUSA

OFFENSE Year 2 under head coach Charles Kelly will feature many familiar faces, although the offense transitions to first-year coordinator Taylor Housewright. Dual-threat quarterback Caden Creel returns after throwing for 1,514 yards and running for 1,075 last season, with 16 total touchdowns. Redshirt freshman Jack Moran is likely to serve as the backup.

The running back room will lose Conference USA MVP Cam Cook, but it still has depth in Justus Savage, Andrew Paul, Khristian Lando, Jalen Likely and Lucas Farrington. The offensive line features experienced returnees Jeremiah Orr, Lance Johnson and Lucas Mrachkovskiy.

Leading receiver Deondre Johnson, who had 30 catches for 724 yards and six touchdowns and stands 6-foot-8, returns alongside Dylan Gentry, Franklin Baret Jr. and Gabe Glover. Missouri State transfer Ronnel Johnson (463 yards, two touchdowns) and FCS Murray State transfer Darius Cannon (737 yards, three touchdowns) are also expected to be involved.

DEFENSE Despite some departures, the defense has a solid core returning. Cornerbacks Tre'Quon Fegans and Jaheim Jenkins had strong seasons, with first-team All-CUSA safety Caleb Nix also back after recording four interceptions and three fumble recoveries in 2025.

Leading tackler Mac Sanders returns after recording 85 total stops and a team-high 11.5 tackles for a loss as a freshman. Fellow linebacker Walker O'Steen, who ranked second on the team with 84 tackles, will line up alongside Ian Mitchell and Myles Butler.

The Gamecocks took a hit on the defensive line, losing their two sack leaders, and will turn to returnees Khurtiss Perry (21 tackles, 4.5 tackles for a loss), Gharin Stansbury (six quarterback hurries, five tackles for a loss) and Jawaun Campbell (22 tackles). Wisconsin transfer Angel Toombs is also likely to find a spot in the rotation up front.

SPECIALISTS Jax State's special teams unit returns first-team All-CUSA kicker Garrison Rippa, who went 40-for-40 on extra points and had a season-long field goal of 52 yards last season, and starting punter Conor Donaghy. A native of Ireland, Donaghy averaged 39.6 yards per punt last season. Cannon and Gentry are among Jax State's options on returns.

FINAL ANALYSIS The roster returns a strong core group and has made some solid additions via the transfer portal. Establishing a run game alongside Creel at quarterback will be the biggest key entering 2026 under a new offensive coordinator. The Gamecocks have played for a CUSA championship in each of the past two seasons — winning one — and made three straight bowl appearances, proving they belong in the CUSA conversation on a consistent basis. This season looks to be no different.

CADEN CREEL

SCOUTING THE GAMECOCKS

"I think it's gonna be a lot of the same with them. Fortunately for us, [running back Cam Cook] is gone, but [quarterback Caden Creel] is still there, and their leading receiver, Deondre Johnson, is still there. I thought one of the more interesting things they did was take a bunch of Division II guys in the portal. That's kind of where they hung their hat. It'll be interesting to see how those guys handle moving up. ... For the most part, they were able to keep a decent amount intact while replacing the departures with some productive guys. I think they're gonna end up being the same. Really similar football team to what they were last year, but they're gonna have to have some guys step up and fill some voids, especially on the D-line."

— An opposing CUSA assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)				
WR	11	Deondre Johnson (Jr.)	9	Ronnel Johnson* (Jr.)
WR	84	Franklin Baret Jr. (So.)	81	Gabe Glover (So.)
WR	5	Dylan Gentry (So.)	3	Darius Cannon* (So.)
LT	**79**	**LANCE JOHNSON (SO.)**	73	J.R. Jernigan (So.)
LG	56	Daylan Martin (So.)	65	Britin Witt* (Jr.)
C	**50**	**LUCAS MRACHKOVSKIY (SO.)**	63	Ryland Bragg (Fr.)
RG	55	Ryan Walker* (So.)	54	Markevian Blake (Fr.)
RT	70	Jeremiah Orr (Sr.)	74	Amarii Atchison* (So.)
TE	83	David Alpers III* (So.)	88	Kam Bell (Jr.)
QB	**12**	**CADEN CREEL (JR.)**	15	Jack Moran (Fr.)
RB	21	Justus Savage (So.)	0	Andrew Paul (Sr.)
DEFENSE (5)				
DE	91	Gharin Stansbury (Sr.)	36	Angel Toombs* (Jr.)
DT	44	Khurtiss Perry (Sr.)	96	Nii Addy* (So.)
DT	**93**	**JAWAUN CAMPBELL (JR.)**	16	Quay Hood (So.)
OLB	13	Jacob Cruz (Sr.)	4	Shane Payton Hodges (Jr.)
ILB	**59**	**MAC SANDERS (SO.)**	0	Myles Butler (Sr.)
ILB	**40**	**WALKER O'STEEN (SR.)**	53	Ian Mitchell (So.)
CB	**3**	**TRE'QUON FEGANS (SR.)**	10	RJ Rainer (So.)
CB	22	Jaheim Jenkins (Sr.)	9	Jonavan Carr* (So.)
HUSKY	5	Rob Billings IV* (So.)	6	Kaden Cook* (Fr.)
S	**1**	**CALEB NIX (SR.)**	25	Vernon Woodward III* (Fr.)
S	7	Marc Woods (So.)	27	Riggs Dunn (So.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	37	Garrison Rippa (Jr.)	KR	3 Darius Cannon* (So.)
P	87	Conor Donaghy (So.)	PR	3 Darius Cannon* (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

2025 RESULTS (9-5, 7-1 CUSA)

Aug. 28	at UCF	L	10-17
Sept. 6	Liberty	W	34-24
Sept. 13	at Georgia Southern	L	34-41
Sept. 20	Murray State	W	45-10
Sept. 27	at Southern Miss	L	25-42
Oct. 9	at Sam Houston	W	29-27
Oct. 15	Delaware	W	38-25
Oct. 29	at Middle Tennessee	W	24-21
Nov. 8	at UTEP	W	30-27
Nov. 15	Kennesaw State	W	35-26
Nov. 22	at FIU	L	21-27
Nov. 29	WKU	W	37-34
Dec. 5	Kennesaw State #	L	15-19
Dec. 16	vs. Troy %	W	17-13

#C-USA Championship %Salute to Veterans Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Aug. 29	at North Dakota St.
Sept. 5	Eastern Kentucky
Sept. 12	at Ohio
Sept. 19	Georgia Southern
Sept. 26	Middle Tennessee
Oct. 7	at Kennesaw State
Oct. 13	FIU
Oct. 28	at New Mexico State
Nov. 7	Sam Houston
Nov. 14	at WKU
Nov. 21	Missouri State
Nov. 28	at Delaware

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Brayden Matthews, LB	★★★
2.	Maurice Winston, RB	★★★
3.	JT Howell, IOL	★★★
4.	Andrevius Smith, EDGE	★★★
5.	Cedric Kouemi, RB	★★★
6.	Jermaine Waters Jr., EDGE	★★★
7.	Donovan Moorhead, QB	★★★
8.	Noah Lee, QB	★★★
9.	Rodarion Jones, CB	★★★
10.	Javan Allison, CB	★★★

*Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Charles Kelly • Record at School: 9-5 (1 year)
Career Record: 9-5 (1 year) • Offensive Coordinator: Taylor Housewright
Defensive Coordinator: Brian Williams • Location: Jacksonville, Ala.
Stadium: AmFirst Stadium (22,500)

JAKE CRANDALL/ ADVERTISER

TYWON CHRISTOPHER

SCOUTING THE OWLS

"[Quarterback Amari Odom] was a big part of why they flipped the script. I'm not gonna say that they had an easy schedule, but I definitely think that they got kind of lucky on that side of things. It all started with [Odom]. What he was able to do with his legs and his arm, he was hard to contain, hard to stop. It'll be interesting this year with [Syracuse transfer quarterback Rickie Collins]. ... Unfortunately for them, they lost pretty much their entire roster. We'll see if they flipped it, but it looks like they've got a good quarterback coming in, and if he can replicate what [Odom] did, I think that they'll be just fine."

— An opposing CUSA assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (2)

WR	9	Davis Bryson (Sr.)	11	Brayden Munroe* (Sr.)
WR	13	Dylan Gary* (Jr.)	4	Zion Booker* (Sr.)
WR	15	Javon Rogers (Jr.)	0	Keon Davis* (Jr.)
LT	**56**	**JADARIOUS LEE (SR.)**	71	ZaMario Woodgett (Fr.)
LG	51	Mike Wallace Jr.* (So.)	56	JaDarious Lee (Sr.)
C	55	Mateo Guevara* (Sr.)	69	Chase Stevens (So.)
RG	75	Precious Ekeh* (Jr.)	66	Luke Duska* (Sr.)
RT	**76**	**NIKOLA MILOVAC (JR.)**	62	Darius Neals* (So.)
TE	19	Reed Jesiolowski* (Jr.)	88	Jamari Harrold (So.)
QB	1	Rickie Collins* (Jr.)	2	Landon Varnes* (So.)
RB	21	Triston Morgan* (Sr.)	6	Latrelle Murrell* (Jr.)

DEFENSE (5)

DE	**6**	**MARCUS PATTERSON (SR.)**	55	Ugonna Nwoha (Sr.)
NT	96	Jaiden Grimes (Jr.)	92	Jackson Cooper (So.)
DT	15	Devin Morgan* (Sr.)	99	Nasir Smith (So.)
RUSH	14	Donovan Westmoreland (Jr.)	18	Josh Anglin* (Jr.)
MLB	**44**	**BARON HOPSON (SR.)**	**11**	**TYWON CHRISTOPHER (SO.)**
OLB	8	Corey Kelly* (Jr.)	31	Kai Russell* (Sr.)
CB	5	Tay'vion Lawson (So.)	3	Jecari Bryson* (Sr.)
CB	10	Ethan Tookes (Jr.)	7	Luke Evans* (Jr.)
NB	12	Kody Jones (Sr.)	2	Tony Williams Jr.* (Fr.)
S	4	Alexander Ford (Sr.)	**20**	**TYLER HALLUM (SR.)**
S	**9**	**ISAAC PAUL (JR.)**	13	Cam Miller* (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	89	Daniel Kinney (Fr.)	KR	9 Davis Bryson (Sr.)
P	34	Matt McKenzie* (Sr.)	PR	4 Zion Booker* (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** · *2026 TRANSFER

JASON CLARK/GETTY IMAGES

KENNESAW STATE OWLS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 105 | CUSA PREDICTION: 3 | 2025 RECORD: 10-4, 7-1 CUSA

OFFENSE KSU's high-octane attack tied for fourth in Conference USA in total offense (402.4 yards) last season. The Owls lost many of the key components of their attack, notably quarterback Amari Odom, who transferred to Syracuse, and wide receiver Gabe Benyard, who graduated. The quarterback job will fall to either Rickie Collins, who transferred from Syracuse, or Landon Varnes, who came in from Mississippi Gulf Coast CC. The pair emerged from spring practice essentially even.

The all-new crew of running backs is led by transfers Triston Morgan, who ran for 809 yards for Div. II playoff team Benedict, and Latrelle Murrell, who ran for 893 yards at FCS West Georgia. The similarly retooled receiver group features holdover Javon Rogers, who began to emerge in spring camp.

The offensive line will be bigger this year and features two holdovers in tackles JaDarious Lee and Nikola Milovac, with Middle Tennessee transfer Mateo Guevara coming off a dominant spring locked in at center.

DEFENSE The Owls allowed the fourth-fewest points (25.5) per game in CUSA and tied for first with 31 sacks, and they were able to hold onto important pieces of their defense.

Key returners include defensive end Marcus Patterson, rush end Donovan Westmoreland and middle linebacker Baron Hopson. Westmoreland, formerly at South Carolina, was finally healthy and recorded 37 tackles and four sacks. Team leader Hopson decided to return as a grad student after making 72 tackles (nine for a loss) and one interception.

The secondary returns nickel Kody Jones and athletic safety Isaac Paul, who came back after dipping a toe in the transfer portal.

SPECIALISTS Daniel Kinney is finally healthy after battling an undisclosed injury and will have the placekicking job to himself this year. He played four games and was 6-for-7 on field goals with a 50-yarder. Matt McKenzie is an Australian punter who appeared in six games last year for Arizona State, averaging 34.6 yards on 12 kicks.

FINAL ANALYSIS The Owls were one of the nation's biggest success stories last year, as new head coach Jerry Mack led the team to a 10-4 record, the Conference USA championship and the school's first bowl appearance. Mack was named CUSA Coach of the Year and the Bear Bryant National Newcomer Coach of the Year. It was only the fourth time a team has won 10 or more games in only its second season of FBS reclassification. The Owls won't be sneaking up on anyone this time, but they do host regular-season champion Jacksonville State in early October.

2025 RESULTS (10-4, 7-1 CUSA)

Aug. 29	at Wake Forest	L	9-10
Sept. 6	at Indiana	L	9-56
Sept. 13	Merrimack	W	27-13
Sept. 20	Arkansas State	W	28-21
Sept. 27	Middle Tennessee	W	24-16
Oct. 9	Louisiana Tech	W	35-7
Oct. 21	at FIU	W	45-26
Oct. 28	UTEP	W	33-20
Nov. 8	at New Mexico State	W	24-21
Nov. 15	at Jacksonville State	L	26-35
Nov. 22	Missouri State	W	41-34
Nov. 29	at Liberty (ot)	W	48-42
Dec. 5	at Jacksonville State #	W	19-15
Dec. 19	vs. W. Michigan %	L	6-41

#CUSA Championship %Myrtle Beach Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 3	West Georgia
Sept. 12	Georgia State
Sept. 19	at Tennessee
Sept. 26	at Arkansas State
Oct. 7	Jacksonville State
Oct. 14	at Missouri State
Oct. 21	Liberty
Oct. 28	at Middle Tennessee
Nov. 7	Delaware
Nov. 14	at Sam Houston
Nov. 21	FIU
Nov. 28	at WKU

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Jeremiah Tabb, WR	★★★
2.	Landon Varnes, QB	★★★
3.	Celley Davis, RB	★★★
4.	Jordan Holmes, ATH	★★★
5.	Jamarcus Harrison, QB	★★★
6.	Boogie Woods III, RB	★★★
7.	Anthony Carter, IOL	★★★
8.	Mike Wallace Jr., IOL	★★★
9.	Montra Sanford, EDGE	★★★
10.	Jonathan Keys, DL	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Jerry Mack • Record at School: 10-4 (1 year)
Career Record: 41-19 (5 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Mitch Militello
Defensive Coordinator: Marc Mattioli • Location: Kennesaw, Ga.
Stadium: Fifth Third Stadium (10,200)

LIBERTY FLAMES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 91 | CUSA PREDICTION: 2 | 2025 RECORD: 4-8, 3-5 CUSA

OFFENSE There's another quarterback battle on the Mountain as Liberty hopes to get back to the offensive explosiveness that it displayed in 2023. After a disappointing 2025 season, Ethan Vasko (151-of-266 passing, 1,961 yards, 10 TDs, 12 INTs) was sidelined throughout the spring following offseason shoulder surgery to repair an injury that plagued him throughout much of his first season. Liberty has brought in a pair of talented quarterbacks via the transfer portal in Deshawn Purdie (Wake Forest) and Jaylen Henderson (West Virginia), both of whom are battling for the job. The QB's top target figures to be Jamari Person, the Flames' leading returning receiver (28 catches, 315 yards in 2025).

Liberty's rushing attack led the nation in 2023 and ranked fourth nationally in 2024. Last season, the team's production dipped below 250 rushing yards per game (194.0) for the first time in head coach Jamey Chadwell's tenure at Liberty. Now, Chadwell and the Flames will have to sort through five incoming transfer running backs who will be running behind an offensive line that should be the early strength of the offense, returning four starters.

DEFENSE Shawn Quinn has arrived in Lynchburg as the team's new defensive coordinator, coming to Liberty from Virginia Tech, where he was Brent Pry's outside linebackers coach. Quinn will be looking to bring a toughness and physical mindset to a Flames' defense that ranked 10th out of 12 CUSA teams in rushing defense last season.

He gets to work with some key returning players in the front seven, led by linebacker Derrell Farrar, who paced the team with 71 tackles a season ago. Will this group be able to pressure the opposing quarterback? That's something that has plagued the Liberty defense the prior three seasons under Chadwell.

SPECIALISTS Liberty finds itself looking for new specialists, as placekicker Jay Billingsley and punter Max Morgan have exhausted their eligibility. Tyler Black was on the team last year after transferring from Wake Forest but lost the job in training camp. This season, he will have to compete with incoming Div. II McKendree transfer Chase Reeves. Reeves will also be competing at punter with Sam Crossan.

FINAL ANALYSIS Coming off a 4-8 season, the program's first losing campaign in 20 years, Chadwell made several changes to his coaching staff for the first time during his Liberty tenure. In addition to Quinn, the Flames have also hired Cory Peoples from Georgia Tech to help lead the secondary. Those changes, coupled with some enthusiasm behind the incoming transfer quarterbacks, give Liberty some optimism heading into this season.

JAMARI PERSON

SCOUTING THE FLAMES

"It all goes back to the quarterback. Had a lot of turnovers and a lot of system changes. Things like that. Their portal deal with their money situation, they've gotta take the right football guys that love ball. It's not so much an offensive deal. It's, are the players that they have truly invested in football? They're just not as tough as they were when that coaching staff first got in there. ... Are they getting guys for the right reasons? I think they found out the hard way last year that they were paying some guys that just wanted to get the money, collect a check and move on from there. We'll see how well they did this year from a character standpoint and just figuring out if they took the right guys that want to play football."

— An opposing CUSA assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)					
WR	3	Jamari Person (Sr.)	8	Nasir Newkirk (Fr.)
WR	2	Makai Jackson* (Sr.)	10	Jon Monteiro (So.)
WR	12	Rashawn Cunningham* (So.)	9	Bryce Randolph (Fr.)
LT	**51**	**D.J. GETH (JR.)**	52	Kevin Evehe* (So.)
LG	**60**	**JOEP ENGBERS (JR.)**	76	Gabe Smith (Fr.)
C	**61**	**AARON FENIMORE (JR.)**	62	Blake Martin (Fr.)
RG	53	Alex Birchmeier* (Jr.)	66	Erwil Anthony Jr. (Sr.)
RT	70	Austin Anderson (Jr.)	**56**	**CHRISTIAN WILLIAMS (SR.)**
TE	48	Caleb Ryan (Sr.)	87	LaKelsey Johnson Jr.* (Sr.)
QB	5	Deshawn Purdie* (Fr.)	13	Jaylen Henderson* (Sr.)
RB	7	Peyton Jones* (Jr.)	0	Jaylon Coleman (So.)
DEFENSE (3)				
DE	**18**	**AARON HESTER (SR.)**	91	Michael Floyde* (So.)
DT	**97**	**MIKE JARVIS (SR.)**	88	Kam Cullins (So.)
DT	15	Markus Clark (Sr.)	56	Samuel Cohen (So.)
JOKER	8	Brenton Williams (Jr.)	11	Lorenzo Payne* (Jr.)
LB	**1**	**DERRELL FARRAR (JR.)**	30	Ethan Crisp (Jr.)
LB	33	Aidan Vaughan (Sr.)	6	Dillano Glaud (So.)
LB	4	Micah Pollard (Sr.)	9	Deuce Spurlock (Sr.)
CB	5	Elijah Hopkins (Sr.)	21	Ashton McShane* (So.)
CB	28	Jamal Miles (Jr.)	2	Jiquavious Marshall (So.)
S	0	D-Icey Hopkins* (Sr.)	17	Jayden Davis* (Jr.)
S	3	Ashton Whitner* (Sr.)	7	Izaiah Guy* (Jr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	98	Tyler Black (So.)	KR	10	Jon Monteiro (So.)
P	49	Sam Crossan (So.)	PR	0	Jaylon Coleman (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

ISAIAH VAZQUEZ/GETTY IMAGES

2025 RESULTS (4-8, 3-5 CUSA)

Aug. 30	Maine	W	28-7
Sept. 6	at Jacksonville State	L	24-34
Sept. 13	at Bowling Green	L	13-23
Sept. 20	James Madison	L	13-31
Sept. 27	at Old Dominion	L	7-21
Oct. 8	at UTEP	W	19-8
Oct. 14	New Mexico State	W	30-27
Nov. 1	Delaware	W	59-30
Nov. 8	Missouri State	L	17-21
Nov. 15	at FIU (ot)	L	27-34
Nov. 22	at Louisiana Tech (ot)	L	28-34
Nov. 29	Kennesaw State (ot)	L	42-48

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	at James Madison
Sept. 12	Gardner-Webb
Sept. 19	Ball State
Sept. 24	at Coastal Carolina
Oct. 2	at Delaware
Oct. 8	Sam Houston
Oct. 21	at Kennesaw State
Oct. 31	FIU
Nov. 7	at New Mexico St.
Nov. 14	Middle Tennessee
Nov. 21	WKU
Nov. 28	at Missouri State

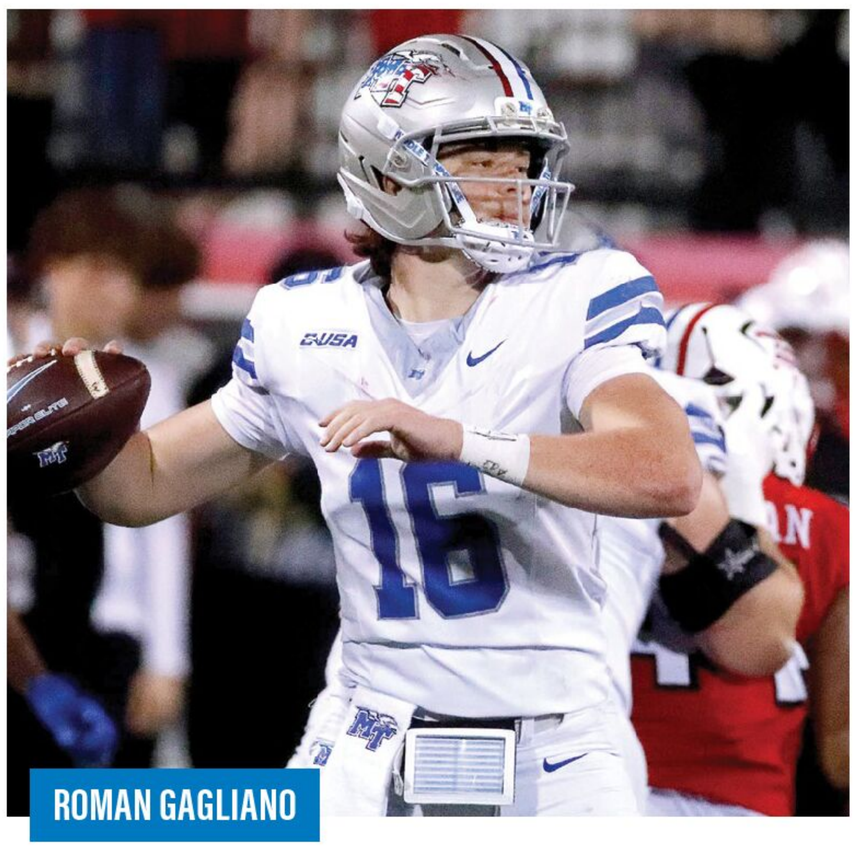
TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Ellis Alloway, LB	★★★
2.	Tony Arnett, S	★★★
3.	Jakobe Dejesus, WR	★★★
4.	Macaiden Brown, S	★★★
5.	Jachin Davis, QB	★★★
6.	Hunter Winn, IOL	★★★
7.	Austin Tremblay, IOL	★★★
8.	Cam Wood, RB	★★★
9.	Daniel Schiffert, IOL	★★★
10.	Malcolm Gaston, IOL	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Jamey Chadwell • Record at School: 25-13 (3 years) • Career Record: 123-70 (16 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Newland Isaac • Defensive Coordinator: Shawn Quinn • Location: Lynchburg, Va. • Stadium: Williams Stadium (25,000)



ROMAN GAGLIANO

SCOUTING THE BLUE RAIDERS

"Seems like they've had a lot of coaching changes on that staff. Like, they lost [offensive line coach] Kendall Simmons in the middle of the season. How are you gonna be consistent when you're losing coaches in-season? And they had a change with their offensive coordinator. I think Derek [Mason] is a really good coach, and a really good scheme guy, and I'm surprised that they haven't had success. ... They do have [quarterback Roman Gagliano] coming back. But it's gonna be tough because they've replaced both coordinators every year that Mason has been there. There's just so much turnover roster-wise and coaches-wise. They didn't get a ton of production guys in the portal. I don't feel very confident about them. That's for sure."

— An opposing CUSA assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (1)

WR	6	**AJ JONES (SR.)**	1	Markus Allen* (Sr.)
WR	13	Cam'ron Lacy (Jr.)	7	Hogan Wasson* (Sr.)
WR	89	Landon Collins (So.)	19	Kason Stokes (So.)
LT	78	Kyle Larkin (Fr.)	53	Roman Jones (Fr.)
LG	61	Otto Janse Van Rensburg (So.)	57	Bo Bryan (Fr.)
C	71	Quentin Butler (Jr.)	76	Garrett Austin (Fr.)
RG	75	Reese Tripp* (Jr.)	63	Alex Gale (So.)
RT	77	Diego Blattler (Jr.)	62	Tim Jacobs* (Jr.)
TE	88	Tayvion Galloway* (So.)	39	Evan Poticher (Jr.)
QB	16	Roman Gagliano (So.)	18	Stanley Anderson-Lofton (Fr.)
RB	29	DJ Taylor (So.)	8	Antonio Martin Jr.* (Sr.)

DEFENSE (3)

DE	93	Aidan Butts (Jr.)	49	Tiyyan Robinson (So.)
NT	91	Felix Hixon (Sr.)	67	Archie Roseman V (Fr.)
DT	95	Zeion Simpson-Smith (So.)	90	Justin Bodford (So.)
EDGE	31	Mathias Malaki-Donaldson (Sr.)	17	Jayson Lowe (Jr.)
MLB	13	Ashton Taylor* (Sr.)	26	Korey Smith (Jr.)
WLB	46	**REGGIE JOHNSON (SR.)**	52	Micah Smith (Fr.)
CB	2	**JACKSON LOWE (SO.)**	15	Devan Carlisle (Jr.)
CB	12	Ricky Lee III* (Jr.)	24	Camari Hall (So.)
NB	23	KJ Miniefield (Jr.)	28	Alan Young (Jr.)
S	18	**KALEN WOODS (SR.)**	38	Locke Kennedy (So.)
S	10	Jordan Chestnut (Sr.)	7	Christopher Noble (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	91	Dominic Bourgeois* (Sr.)	KR	29 DJ Taylor (So.)
P	92	Ashton Logan (Sr.)	PR	29 DJ Taylor (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** · *2026 TRANSFER

HELEN COMER/THE DAILY NEWS JOURNAL

MIDDLE TENNESSEE BLUE RAIDERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 133 | CUSA PREDICTION: 9 | 2025 RECORD: 3-9, 2-6 CUSA

OFFENSE Middle Tennessee lost quarterback Nicholas Vattiato (2,150 passing yards, 16 TDs), who ranked third in Conference USA in passing efficiency at 122.9, to graduation. It's sophomore Roman Gagliano's job now after he passed for 1,005 yards and seven touchdowns in five games last season. Having some stability at quarterback is good news for the Blue Raiders, who are coming off consecutive three-win seasons.

First-year offensive coordinator Anthony Scelfo has very few returning skill players to work with. AJ Jones is the lone returning starter on offense. Running back Antonio Martin Jr. (Kansas State) is an experienced transfer portal addition to the backfield alongside DJ Taylor, who averaged 7.7 yards per carry last season (albeit on only 26 carries).

The offensive line must improve after the unit surrendered 30 sacks for 224 lost yards in 2025. Otto Janse Van Rensburg returns from injury up front.

DEFENSE There was some slight improvement for the MTSU defense last season, although the Blue Raiders still gave up 30.9 points and 399.3 yards per game. The run defense was a bright spot, finishing second in CUSA in allowing 143.1 rushing yards per game, compared to 197 yards the year prior.

Three returning starters on the defensive line helped bring those numbers down, but all three are now gone. Defensive tackle Zeion Simpson-Smith had three sacks and a fumble recovery as a freshman and is due for a bigger role.

Reggie Johnson leads all returning linebackers after tallying 34 tackles and 3.5 sacks. Jackson Lowe (four pass breakups last season) returns to a secondary that ranked 11th in the league in pass defense.

SPECIALISTS Dominic Bourgeois, a transfer from Div. III Susquehanna, is in line for placekicking duties. Ashton Logan returns at punter. He averaged 44.7 yards on 66 punts and downed 29 of them inside the opponent's 20-yard line in 2025. Taylor shared kickoff return duties last year, averaging 17.4 yards per return in that role.

FINAL ANALYSIS Head coach Derek Mason finds himself in a potential make-or-break season in his third year at the helm of the Blue Raiders. MTSU ended its 2025 campaign on a positive note, winning its last two games with its two highest-scoring outputs of the season (31 points in both games), but the offense has to replace plenty of lost production while adjusting to five new offensive coaches. The defense was more physical last season, but it will have to replace its four leading tacklers and returns only 7.5 of its 23 sacks.

2025 RESULTS (3-9, 2-6 CUSA)

Aug. 30	Austin Peay	L	14-34
Sept. 6	at Wisconsin	L	10-42
Sept. 13	at Nevada	W	14-13
Sept. 20	Marshall	L	28-42
Sept. 27	at Kennesaw State	L	16-24
Oct. 8	Missouri State	L	20-22
Oct. 22	at Delaware	L	28-31
Oct. 29	Jacksonville State	L	21-24
Nov. 8	FIU	L	30-56
Nov. 15	at WKU	L	26-42
Nov. 22	Sam Houston	W	31-17
Nov. 29	at New Mexico St. (ot)	W	31-24

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	Murray State
Sept. 12	at Marshall
Sept. 19	Nevada
Sept. 26	at Jacksonville State
Oct. 3	at Kansas
Oct. 13	Delaware
Oct. 20	at FIU
Oct. 28	Kennesaw State
Nov. 7	WKU
Nov. 14	at Liberty
Nov. 21	at Sam Houston
Nov. 28	New Mexico State

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Bryson Maddox, WR	★★★
2.	Ethan Sherman, WR	★★★
3.	Bryce Williams, S	★★★
4.	Rocco Williams, QB	★★★
5.	Robert Lathon Jr., RB	★★★
6.	Ziyon Butler, WR	★★★
7.	Shane Rochelle, LB	★★★
8.	Ashley Walker, OT	★★★
9.	Justis Haggard, S	★★★
10.	Jadin Hambrick, TE	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Derek Mason • Record at School: 6-18 (2 years) • Career Record: 33-73 (8+ years) • Offensive Coordinator: Anthony Scelfo • Defensive Coordinator: Brian Stewart • Location: Murfreesboro, Tenn. • Stadium: Floyd Stadium (27,303)

MISSOURI STATE BEARS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 128 | CUSA PREDICTION: 7 | 2025 RECORD: 7-6, 5-3 CUSA

OFFENSE New Bears head coach Casey Woods will try to blend several key returners with transfers at quarterback and other key offensive spots. Quarterback transfers Henry Belin IV (Duke) and Skyler Locklear (UTEP) have experience and different skill sets, but Woods thinks either can effectively run the offense. "Both have got a chance," Woods says. "We've got versatility in our offense to fit their strengths."

The quarterbacks have options in the passing game as Jmariyae Robinson, who led Missouri State in receptions (44) and touchdown catches (seven) last fall, is back alongside key returnees James BlackStrain and Makai Cope and Tulsa transfer Mekhi Miller.

Missouri State also retained running back Ramone Green Jr., who will pair with Boise State transfer Jambres Dubar. Woods likes the tight end depth with Jeron Askren, Dillon Hipp and James Rexroat.

Offensive line depth is a concern, as the staff will need transfers such as Isaiah Villanueva and Sebastian Espinoza to contribute, along with returnees including Makhete Gueye and Logan Scrivner.

DEFENSE The unit has a centerpiece in linebacker Jared Lloyd, who tied for the team lead in tackles in 2025, and Woods likes the depth at edge. Transfers Kellen Lindstrom, Jalile Elliott and Josh Lukusa will complement Caden Wiest, who had two sacks last fall. Tim Brantley Jr. headlines the tackle group, which includes Iowa State transfer Markell Chapman. "If that depth develops like I think it can, we've got a chance to be pretty good on the defensive line," Woods says.

Lloyd leads a linebacker group also returning Cooper Roy, Austin Yelder, Jashawn Cooper and Martavis Blackmon. "He's been a great offseason leader for us," Woods says of Lloyd.

Safety projects well with Dylan Dixson and Christian Ford, who combined for 102 tackles last season, both returning. Missouri State went to the portal for two Joels — Kpassou and Boamah — at cornerback.

SPECIALISTS Kicker Yousef Obeid, who earned honorable mention All-Conference USA honors last season, and primary punter Stewart McDonald are both back. Robinson shared kickoff return duties in 2025 and averaged 19.4 yards per return.

FINAL ANALYSIS There's significant turnover on both lines, but if the offensive front can protect Belin or Locklear, there should be playmaking opportunities with the wideout and tight end depth. Missouri State has trips to Texas A&M and SMU before beginning Conference USA play. "I'm really excited for them to get in front of that," Woods says. "It will be a great measuring stick."

2025 RESULTS (7-6, 5-3 CUSA)

Aug. 30	at USC	L	13-73
Sept. 6	at Marshall	W	21-20
Sept. 13	SMU	L	10-28
Sept. 20	Tennessee-Martin	W	42-10
Sept. 27	WKU	L	22-27
Oct. 8	at Middle Tennessee	W	22-20
Oct. 22	at New Mexico St. (ot)	W	24-17
Oct. 29	FIU	W	28-21
Nov. 8	at Liberty	W	21-17
Nov. 15	UTEP	W	38-24
Nov. 22	at Kennesaw State	L	34-41
Nov. 29	Louisiana Tech	L	30-42
Dec. 18	vs. Arkansas State #	L	28-34

#Xbox Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	at Texas A&M
Sept. 12	Lindenwood
Sept. 19	Marshall
Sept. 26	at SMU
Oct. 8	at WKU
Oct. 14	Kennesaw State
Oct. 20	at Delaware
Oct. 27	Sam Houston
Nov. 7	at FIU
Nov. 14	New Mexico State
Nov. 21	at Jacksonville State
Nov. 28	Liberty

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Jedrick Russell Jr., LB	★★★
2.	Maurice Jones Jr., LB	★★★
3.	Josiah Turner, S	★★★
4.	Chase Mideau, DL	★★★
5.	Deion Thomas, ATH	★★★
6.	Brett Ottensmeyer, QB	★★★
7.	Amar'e Johnson, RB	★★★
8.	Jerrick Martin, WR	★★★
9.	Brandon Hightower, DL	★★★
10.	Santiago Castillo, IOL	★★★

*Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Casey Woods • Record at School: First Season
Career Record: First Season • Offensive Coordinator: Mark Cala
Defensive Coordinator: Jack Curtis • Location: Springfield, Mo.
Stadium: Robert W. Plaster Stadium (17,500)

JMARIYAE ROBINSON

SCOUTING THE BEARS

"Offensively, they'll change a little bit with that new staff. It's just tough for them because they got there late when the portal opened, so they were kind of scrambling to try and take some guys. ... They took [UTEP transfer quarterback] Skyler Locklear, so that'll be interesting. I think they'll be different, but I also think that they got some good coaches who are gonna scheme 'em up, put them in the right situations like [new head coach Casey Woods] did at SMU. To me, that one is a little different from a player standpoint. They may not be the most talented, but I think that they're gonna be very, very well-coached."

— An opposing CUSA assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (2)

WR	**0**	**JMARIYAE ROBINSON (SR.)**	81	AJ Bell Jr. (Fr.)
WR	5	James BlackStrain (Sr.)	83	Amare Whetsell (Fr.)
WR	11	Makai Cope (Sr.)	6	Mekhi Miller* (Sr.)
LT	77	Sebastian Espinoza* (Jr.)	66	Makhete Gueye (Sr.)
LG	71	King Large* (Fr.)	67	Ben Liedtke (Jr.)
C	72	Isaiah Villanueva* (Sr.)	75	Logan Scrivner (So.)
RG	75	Logan Scrivner (So.)	52	Isaiah Villanueva* (Sr.)
RT	54	Matthew Greene (Jr.)		William Dixon* (Sr.)
TE	**88**	**JERON ASKREN (SO.)**	85	Dillon Hipp (So.)
QB	2	Henry Belin IV* (Sr.)	9	Skyler Locklear* (Sr.)
RB	22	Ramone Green Jr. (Jr.)	1	Breezy Dubar* (Sr.)

DEFENSE (4)

DE	5	Kellen Lindstrom* (So.)	92	Josh Lukusa* (Sr.)
DT	11	Tim Brantley Jr. (Jr.)	52	Kaden Jones* (Jr.)
DT	99	Markell Chapman* (Jr.)	44	Malachi Madison* (Sr.)
DE	30	Caden Wiest (Jr.)	10	Jalile Elliott* (So.)
LB	31	Cooper Roy (Jr.)	15	Martavis Blackmon (Jr.)
LB	**0**	**JARED LLOYD (SR.)**	38	Stratton Shufelt* (Jr.)
LB	35	Austin Yelder (Jr.)	21	Jashawn Cooper (So.)
CB	8	Joel Kpassou* (Sr.)	20	Floyd Williams (Jr.)
CB	12	Joel Boamah* (Jr.)	26	Darryon Taylor (Sr.)
S	**9**	**DYLAN DIXSON (SR.)**	**16**	**J.J. O'NEAL (SR.)**
S	**29**	**CHRISTIAN FORD (JR.)**	18	Geo Jallah* (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	36	Yousef Obeid (Jr.)	**KR**	0	Jmariyae Robinson (Sr.)
P	25	Stewart McDonald (So.)	**PR**	8	Joel Kpassou* (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

MICHAEL GULLEDGE/SPECIAL TO THE NEWS-LEADER

TK KING

BRYAN LYNN/ICON SPORTSWIRE VIA GETTY IMAGES

NEW MEXICO STATE AGGIES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 129 | CUSA PREDICTION: 8 | 2025 RECORD: 4-8, 2-6 CUSA

OFFENSE New Mexico State improved in 2025, but the Aggies still struggled to produce consistent offense, finishing 113th nationally in yards per game. To address that deficiency, they're turning to junior transfer quarterback Trey Hedden from FCS Furman. Hedden inherits a receiving group with vertical threats, including TK King, who totaled 588 receiving yards and three touchdowns last season after missing time early with an injury. The return of AJ Williams III adds intrigue after he missed 2025 due to injury following his transfer from Div. III Mary Hardin-Baylor.

Protection and line play were also concerns. New Mexico State allowed nearly three sacks per game in 2025, prompting the staff to bring in multiple experienced offensive linemen through the transfer portal to reinforce the unit and improve both pass protection and physicality.

The biggest issue last season came on the ground. The Aggies tied for last in the FBS at just 2.6 yards per carry, often leaving the offense one-dimensional. FCS Delaware State transfer James Jones and Iowa transfer TJ Washington Jr. join returning starter Dijon Stanley, and even modest improvement in the run game should open up the passing attack and provide needed balance.

DEFENSE New Mexico State forced 24 turnovers last season — nine fumbles and 15 interceptions — which tied for 14th nationally. That ability to create extra possessions helped keep the Aggies competitive.

While the Aggies do lose some pieces, there is reason to believe this unit can remain reliable. Tayden Barnes returns after starting all 12 games in 2024 before transferring to Cincinnati in 2025, and he brings versatility across the secondary, capable of lining up at nickel or either safety spot. He'll be part of a secondary that also features Nick Session.

At linebacker, the Aggies return the duo of Tory Gethers and Sone Aupiu. Gethers recorded 88 total tackles, three sacks and one forced fumble, while Aupiu added 68 tackles, one sack, two forced fumbles and an interception in 11 games.

SPECIALISTS The kicking game will feature competition at placekicker, while Minnesota transfer Brody Richter appears set to handle punting duties. The return game could be a strength, with King and Stanley both capable of flipping field position.

FINAL ANALYSIS New Mexico State has brought in fresh faces in an effort to return to bowl eligibility. Head coach Tony Sanchez enters his third season after two years of growing pains. With a favorable schedule and key transfers in place, a path to six wins is there if the offense finds balance and the defense limits explosive plays.

SCOUTING THE AGGIES

"I know that they really hang their hat on being a juco-centric team. Last year, I bet over 50% of their roster was juco guys. I'm not necessarily saying that's a bad thing, but I do think that you've gotta have a fine balance when it comes to that. ... The quarterback situation is another piece to it. Since they lost Diego Pavia [to Vanderbilt in 2024], they've been trying to find another guy who can do those things, but that dude is always hard to replace. But yeah, they're just heavy on juco guys that you know, for whatever reason, haven't been able to pan out for them."

— An opposing CUSA assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)				
WR	11	AJ Williams III (Jr.)	6	Brodie Malone-Bradford (So.)
WR	**1**	**TK KING (SR.)**	7	TJ Pride (Jr.)
WR	5	Myles Libman* (Jr.)	9	Terrione Graves (Jr.)
LT	55	Ma'Kyi Lee (Sr.)	77	Gavin Jones (Fr.)
LG	69	James Williams* (Jr.)	50	Luke Moise* (Jr.)
C	56	Mark Chapman* (Sr.)	58	Sioeli Helu (Sr.)
RG	**70**	**MATEO RODRIGUEZ (SO.)**	78	Armond Owens* (Jr.)
RT	54	Tyler Keinath* (Sr.)	71	Evan Blaettler (Jr.)
TE	18	Joshua Goines (Jr.)	88	Carson Su'esu'e* (Fr.)
QB	3	Trey Hedden* (Jr.)	14	Adam Damante (Jr.)
RB	2	James Jones* (Sr.)	**8**	**DIJON STANLEY (SR.)**
DEFENSE (5)				
DE	**16**	**GABE PETERSON (SR.)**	15	Obinna Okeke (Jr.)
DT	97	Henry Davis III (Sr.)	95	Josiah Jackson (Sr.)
DT	44	Enzo-Pierre Tayou (Sr.)	13	Kaian Roberts-Day* (Sr.)
DE	21	Zhakius Thomas* (Jr.)	8	Brad Vislisel (Jr.)
MLB	**14**	**SONE AUPIU (SR.)**	10	Chance Barron (Jr.)
WLB	**6**	**TORY GETHERS (SR.)**	34	Zaiden Davis (So.)
CB	4	De'Marcus Peters* (Sr.)	0	Lorenzo Smith (Sr.)
CB	**1**	**JOSIAH CHARLES (SR.)**	12	Amaurey Brooks* (So.)
NB	3	Tayden Barnes* (Jr.)	7	Saveon Freeman (Jr.)
S	**5**	**NICK SESSION (SR.)**	20	DJ Cloyd (Sr.)
S	9	Bernock Iya (Sr.)	22	RJ Chapman* (Sr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	17	Ilya Uvaydov* (Sr.)	KR	8 Dijon Stanley (Sr.)
P	91	Brody Richter* (Sr.)	PR	1 TK King (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** · *2026 TRANSFER

2025 RESULTS (4-8, 2-6 CUSA)

Aug. 30	Bryant	W	19-3
Sept. 6	Tulsa	W	21-14
Sept. 13	at Louisiana Tech	L	14-49
Sept. 27	at New Mexico	L	20-38
Oct. 2	Sam Houston	W	37-10
Oct. 14	at Liberty	L	27-30
Oct. 22	Missouri State (ot)	L	17-24
Nov. 1	at WKU	L	16-35
Nov. 8	Kennesaw State	L	21-24
Nov. 15	at Tennessee	L	9-42
Nov. 22	at UTEP	W	34-31
Nov. 29	Middle Tennessee (ot)	L	24-31

2026 SCHEDULE

Aug. 29	at Florida State
Sept. 5	Mercyhurst
Sept. 12	at Hawai'i
Sept. 26	New Mexico
Oct. 1	WKU
Oct. 7	at FIU
Oct. 21	at Sam Houston
Oct. 28	Jacksonville State
Nov. 7	Liberty
Nov. 14	at Missouri State
Nov. 21	Delaware
Nov. 28	at Middle Tennessee

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	JaDarius Sanders, WR	★★★
2.	Xavier Rucker, RB	★★★
3.	Jamaun Thompson, EDGE	★★★
4.	Caleb Pyfrom, IOL	★★★
5.	Garrett Stennett, S	★★★
6.	Jaylyn Manning, LB	★★★
7.	Eric Rivera, S	★★★
8.	Faapaia Fualema, LB	★★★
9.	Isaiah Garcia Perez, IOL	★★★
10.	Kalani Mcleod, QB	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Tony Sanchez • Record at School: 7-17 (2 years) • Career Record: 27-57 (7 years) • Offensive Coordinator: David Yost • Defensive Coordinator: Joe Morris • Location: Las Cruces, N.M. • Stadium: Aggie Memorial Stadium (28,853)

SAM HOUSTON BEARKATS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 137 | CUSA PREDICTION: 10 | 2025 RECORD: 2-10, 1-7 CUSA

OFFENSE There are reasons to be optimistic about this offense in Year 2 of the Phil Longo era. The Bearkats will enter the 2026 campaign with a QB1 in place, as Landyn Locke has solidified his hold on the job after playing in six games for the Kats last year, completing 71 of his 141 attempts for 765 yards and four touchdowns.

Luckily, the Kats will have a lot of weapons returning who will have spent an entire spring, summer and fall camp working with a single starting quarterback and not a rotation. Senior wideout Chris Reed gives Locke a dependable target. Reed played in all 12 games and led the Bearkats with 460 receiving yards and five touchdowns.

In the backfield, Landan "Coco" Brown and Alton McCaskill return after combining for 858 rushing yards.

The biggest concern for this unit: rebuilding an offensive line that lost every starter either to graduation or to the transfer portal.

DEFENSE This marks the second season under defensive coordinator Freddie Aughtry-Lindsay, and the Kats are hoping that they can muster some improvement after ranking last in CUSA in total defense last season, allowing 483.5 yards per game. This will be the first year that Aughtry-Lindsay will have had a full offseason to recruit his own players and hire his own staff, but for a team that surrendered 37.8 points per game, every move will need to yield positive results.

Defensive tackle Dylan Frazier provides a nice building block after posting 41 tackles, four tackles for a loss and two sacks. Some Power 4 transfers — Josh Alexander-Felton (NC State), Stacy Bey (Arizona) and Jace Arnold (Wisconsin) — should slide into the starting lineup after seeing limited time at their former schools.

SPECIALISTS It seems that the placekicking job will belong to either transfer Sam Carpenter or Tate Ryan. Carpenter went 1-of-3 on field goals at Pitt last season, while Ryan took a redshirt at Sam Houston. Punting duties will fall to transfer Cal Joseph, who averaged 38.1 yards per punt at Wake Forest last year.

FINAL ANALYSIS It's only his second season in charge, but this is looking like a make-or-break year for Longo. A year after getting 10 wins and a New Orleans Bowl victory in 2024, the Bearkats struggled to only two wins in Longo's debut. Things could shift in the staff's favor, though, as the team returns to play in refurbished Elliott T. Bowers Stadium after playing every game away from campus. Of course, that also removes any excuses for another disastrous campaign.

2025 RESULTS (2-10, 1-7 CUSA)

Aug. 23	at WKU	L	24-41
Aug. 29	UNLV	L	21-38
Sept. 6	at Hawai'i	L	20-37
Sept. 20	at Texas	L	0-55
Oct. 2	at New Mexico State	L	10-37
Oct. 9	Jacksonville State	L	27-29
Oct. 15	UTEP	L	17-35
Oct. 31	at Louisiana Tech	L	14-55
Nov. 8	at Oregon State	W	21-17
Nov. 15	Delaware	W	26-23
Nov. 22	at Middle Tennessee	L	17-31
Nov. 29	FIU	L	16-56

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	at Troy
Sept. 12	Tulsa
Sept. 19	Nicholls
Sept. 26	at Texas Tech
Oct. 8	at Liberty
Oct. 14	WKU
Oct. 21	New Mexico State
Oct. 27	at Missouri State
Nov. 7	at Jacksonville State
Nov. 14	Kennesaw State
Nov. 21	Middle Tennessee
Nov. 28	at FIU

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Jaylon Jones, S	★★★
2.	Jack Merryman, TE	★★★
3.	Jabaric Sullivan, CB	★★★
4.	Uzziah Warmate, DL	★★★
5.	CJ June, CB	★★★
6.	Robert McFarland, S	★★★
7.	Myles Joseph, IOL	★★★
8.	Demetrius Dowdy, RB	★★★
9.	Kaden Winkfield, RB	★★★
10.	Brett Holloway, QB	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Phil Longo • Record at School: 2-10 (1 year) • Career Record: 9-24 (3 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Zack Patterson • Defensive Coordinator: Freddie Aughtry-Lindsay • Location: Huntsville, Texas • Stadium: Elliott T. Bowers Stadium (14,000)

LANDYN LOCKE

SCOUTING THE BEARKATS

"I think they can turn things around in Year 2 under [head coach] Phil Longo. What they do offensively is really good. They just didn't have a quarterback last year that could run what they were trying to run. Hunter Watson was really damn good, but what they were asking him to do wasn't what he did well. But scheme-wise, and even the guys that they brought in with a short amount of time, were solid players. It's just tough if you don't have a quarterback who fits what you're trying to do. ... They lost a lot of pretty good players, but they ended up signing some dudes that should be able to come in and help right away. I do think that they will be a lot better than what they were last year."

— An opposing CUSA assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (2)

WR	2	**CHRIS REED (SR.)**	5	Kyan Berry-Johnson* (So.)
WR	12	Kamari Maxwell* (So.)	18	Christian Zachary* (So.)
WR	7	Grady O'Neill (Sr.)	3	**TIM BURNS JR. (SR.)**
LT	58	Carter Kadow* (Jr.)	76	Nathan McClelland* (Jr.)
LG	74	Graceson Spann (So.)	75	Elijah Collins* (Jr.)
C	54	Brock Stukes* (Jr.)	60	Cam Todd (Sr.)
RG	71	Denell Nix Jr.* (So.)	57	Zo'Maryon Bryan (Sr.)
RT	67	Isaac Sohn (Jr.)	63	Joe Warren* (Jr.)
TE	87	Max Whisner* (Sr.)	84	London Deyon (So.)
QB	8	Landyn Locke (So.)	15	DJ Bailey (So.)
RB	34	Landan "Coco" Brown (Jr.)	22	Alton McCaskill (Sr.)

DEFENSE (1)

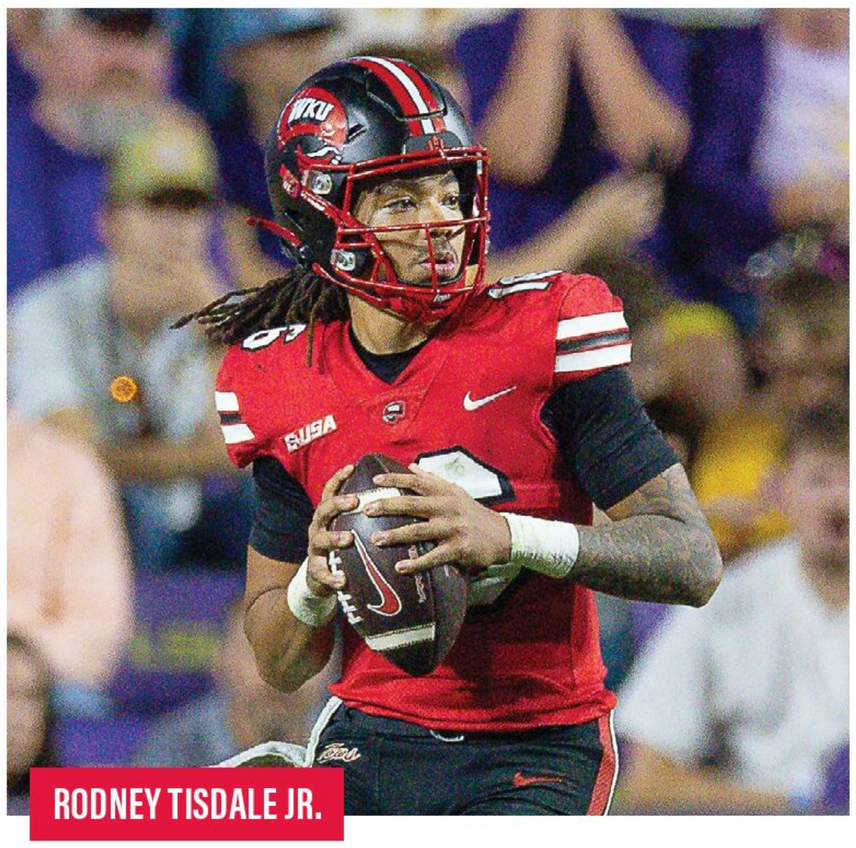
DE	15	Josh Alexander-Felton* (So.)	48	Chauncey Chidi (Sr.)
DT	97	**DYLAN FRAZIER (SR.)**	95	She'Fon Boyd (Jr.)
DT	92	Jarra Anderson* (Jr.)	98	Justin Terrell* (So.)
LB	21	Dean Ford (So.)	33	Brian Bates Jr.* (Jr.)
LB	26	Tokyo Gordon (Sr.)	23	Mike King Jr.* (So.)
LB	18	Stacy Bey* (So.)	12	Elijah Groves* (Fr.)
STRIKER	9	Jace Arnold* (Jr.)	0	William Davis* (Sr.)
CB	5	Jalyn Stanford (Jr.)	3	Joey Hunter* (Sr.)
CB	20	Dravon Wilson (So.)	7	Caesar Magee III* (Sr.)
S	13	Tyler Bailey (Sr.)	29	Lyric Smith (So.)
S	40	Railyn Adams (So.)	6	Jaylon Jones* (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	94	Sam Carpenter* (Jr.)	KR	3 Tim Burns Jr. (Sr.)
P	31	Cal Joseph* (So.)	PR	3 Tim Burns Jr. (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

HELEN COMER/THE DAILY NEWS JOURNAL



RODNEY TISDALE JR.

SCOUTING THE HILLTOPPERS

"[Head coach] Tyson Helton drives that thing. He's a super-smart dude who has a great pulse for his program. They're always going to win because of him. I've got a lot of respect for him and what they do. He's a darn good football coach. He's fallen in love with that part of the country. That's why you don't see him jumping at all of those little flashes in the pan like some people do. ... Eventually, in this business, you get a call that you can't turn down, so if he gets that, who knows? But he's got job security there, which is hard to come by. They love him there. It's hard to leave a place where the structure is built and they're always going to win 8-9 games, even with a revolving door at OC, because of the consistency at the top."

— An opposing CUSA assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)				
WR	2	**K.D. HUTCHINSON (SR.)**	4	Cameron Flowers (So.)
WR	12	Quincy Burroughs (Sr.)	17	Zion Taylor* (Jr.)
WR	21	Nigel Johnson* (Sr.)	84	Jeremiah Carroll* (Sr.)
LT	67	Tai Ray* (Jr.)	64	Jackson Dialls (Fr.)
LG	70	Rhett Larson* (Sr.)	73	Nonso Omezi* (Sr.)
C	50	Alec Johnson* (Sr.)	52	Isiah Stoudemire (Fr.)
RG	51	Roq Montgomery* (Jr.)	76	Max Thurston (So.)
RT	74	**KARSTEN UPCHURCH (SR.)**	59	Alex Lopez* (Fr.)
TE	20	CC Ezirim* (Sr.)	87	Coleson Arends* (Jr.)
QB	16	**RODNEY TISDALE JR. (SO.)**	11	Brock Glenn* (Jr.)
RB	3	Ajay Allen* (Sr.)	9	Kalib Hicks* (Jr.)
DEFENSE (2)				
DE	50	Elin Jones (Sr.)	48	Zsacari Minnis (So.)
DT	99	Eric Etienne (So.)	54	Sekou Peters (Fr.)
DT	52	Jakeem Fletcher (Sr.)	92	Javin Griffin* (Sr.)
DE	55	Venson Sneed (Sr.)	98	Nathan Gonzales* (Sr.)
LB	22	Jordan Donald (So.)	18	Geajorm Akpaloo* (Jr.)
LB	20	Zach Smith (So.)	15	Garrison Madden* (Sr.)
CB	14	Braxton Myers (Jr.)	27	Jordan Bergeron (Fr.)
CB	21	Tony Newsome Jr.* (Sr.)	24	Lataj Wright (Sr.)
NB	10	Christian White* (Sr.)	37	Justin Brown (So.)
S	7	**JAYLEN LEWIS (SR.)**	19	Jacob Cosby-Mosley* (So.)
S	17	**DAVE HERARD (SR.)**	12	BJ Carey* (Sr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	58	Michael Buck (So.)	KR	4 Cameron Flowers (So.)
P	35	Daniel Wall (Fr.)	PR	2 K.D. Hutchinson (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

STEPHEN LEW-IMAGN IMAGES

WKU HILLTOPPERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 89 | CUSA PREDICTION: 1 | 2025 RECORD: 9-4, 6-2 CUSA

OFFENSE Under head coach Tyson Helton, entering his eighth season, the Hilltoppers have become accustomed to learning a new playbook on a near yearly basis, with no offensive coordinator staying for more than two years. Now it's Bodie Reeder's turn to work with the offensive-minded Helton to keep the Tops among CUSA's best passing offenses. Reeder spent the past two seasons at Middle Tennessee, and last season, the Blue Raiders averaged 266.1 passing yards per game, fourth in CUSA.

The Tops likely have a quarterback battle brewing between sophomore Rodney Tisdale Jr. and Florida State transfer Brock Glenn. Tisdale took over starting duties at midseason and performed well, passing for 1,432 yards and nine TDs in nine games, but he lacks Glenn's game experience.

Graduation and portal losses hit hard, but versatile senior K.D. Hutchinson (team-high 66 catches for 618 yards, three TDs) is a proven returning talent, and the Tops had no trouble attracting promising transfers at the skill positions, including running back Ajay Allen (Tulsa and Nebraska), wide receiver Nigel Johnson (FCS South Carolina State) and tight end CC Ezirim (Toledo). The offensive line is almost a complete rebuild, with right tackle Karsten Upchurch the only returning starter.

DEFENSE Last year, the Tops allowed 22.8 points per game (second in CUSA) despite giving up 400.8 yards per game (seventh in CUSA). WKU was particularly strong in the red zone, surrendering touchdowns only 34.7% of the time, the nation's best mark.

Redshirt senior Jaylen Lewis emerged as an impact player at safety (74 tackles, team-high three interceptions) and joins fellow returning starter Dave Herard to form a tough combo. Defensive end Venson Sneed and defensive tackle Jakeem Fletcher return to provide some stability on the defensive front, which lost standout Harper Holloman in the portal to West Virginia. The Tops are thin on experience at linebacker — leading tacklers Jaylen Wester and Anthony Brackenridge both exhausted their eligibility, while Koron Hayward transferred to TCU and Miller Malone went to Houston. Fall camp will feature plenty of competition for jobs.

SPECIALISTS Australian punter Daniel Wall, a freshman, looked strong in the spring, while sophomore Michael Buck likely gets first shot at placekicking. Hutchinson is a dangerous option to return punts, with redshirt sophomore Cameron Flowers back to handle kickoff returns.

FINAL ANALYSIS The early schedule is brutal, and the Tops will have to navigate that stretch and maintain cohesion to contend for a CUSA title again. At the least, expect WKU to extend its bowl streak to eight straight under CUSA's longest-tenured current head coach.

2025 RESULTS (9-4, 6-2 CUSA)

Aug. 23	Sam Houston	W	41-24
Aug. 30	North Alabama	W	55-6
Sept. 6	at Toledo	L	21-45
Sept. 20	Nevada	W	31-16
Sept. 27	at Missouri State	W	27-22
Oct. 3	at Delaware	W	27-24
Oct. 14	FIU	L	6-25
Oct. 21	at Louisiana Tech (ot)	W	28-27
Nov. 1	New Mexico State	W	35-16
Nov. 15	Middle Tennessee	W	42-26
Nov. 22	at LSU	L	10-13
Nov. 29	at Jacksonville State	L	34-37
Dec. 23	vs. Southern Miss #	W	27-16

#New Orleans Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	at Nevada
Sept. 12	at Georgia
Sept. 19	at Indiana
Sept. 26	Mercyhurst
Oct. 1	at New Mexico State
Oct. 8	Missouri State
Oct. 14	at Sam Houston
Oct. 27	Delaware
Nov. 7	at Middle Tennessee
Nov. 14	Jacksonville State
Nov. 21	at Liberty
Nov. 28	Kennesaw State

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Makhi Brazier, LB	★★★
2.	CeeJay Embry, DL	★★★
3.	Cam O'Hara, QB	★★★
4.	La'Kamren Meadows, RB	★★★
5.	Jaylen Pollard, S	★★★
6.	Zayden Walters, IOL	★★★
7.	Westen Ard, LB	★★★
8.	Tre'von McGory, WR	★★★
9.	Asa Holbert, OT	★★★
10.	Bryce Fulda, EDGE	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Tyson Helton • Record at School: 57-36 (7 years) Career Record: 57-36 (7 years) • Offensive Coordinators: Bodie Reeder, Joe Bernardi • Defensive Coordinator: Davis Merritt • Location: Bowling Green, Ky. Stadium: Houchens Industries–L. T. Smith Stadium (19,250)

NOTRE DAME FIGHTING IRISH

NATIONAL FORECAST: 4 | 2025 RECORD: 10-2

OFFENSE With the departure of running backs Jeremiyah Love and Jadarian Price, quarterback CJ Carr will be the focus following his 2,741 passing yards and 24-to-6 touchdown-to-interception ratio in his debut season. Carr has the accuracy and moxie to mount a Heisman Trophy candidacy.

The Irish have an unusually high number of receivers from which to choose, led by 2025 leading receiver Jordan Faison, 2024 national championship game standout Jaden Greathouse and Micah Gilbert. Ohio State transfers Mylan Graham and Quincy Porter will also be significant factors.

The offensive line features two young rising star tackles in Guerby Lambert and Will Black. Third-year starter Anthonie Knapp shifts to left guard from left tackle. The return to health of center Ashton Craig and guard Charles Jagusah would make this a dynamic front wall.

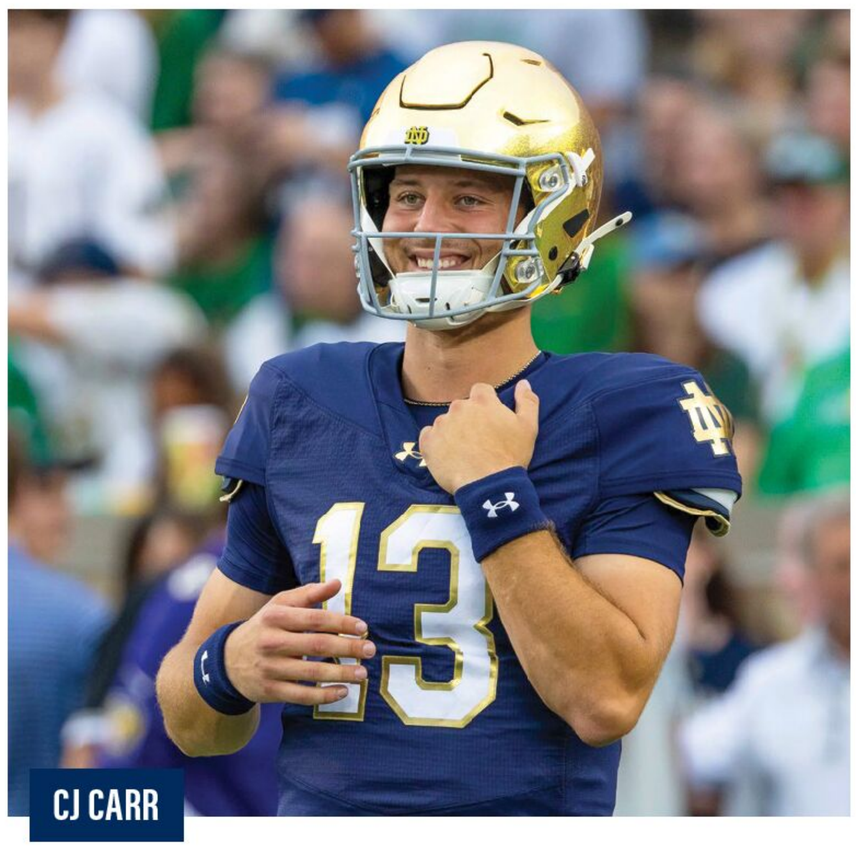
Running backs Aneyas Williams and Nolan James Jr. won't match the Love/Price explosiveness, but both have burst and tackle-breaking ability.

DEFENSE Second-year defensive coordinator Chris Ash has a bevy of experience returning on the back seven, where linebackers Drayk Bowen and Kyngstonn Viliamu-Asa, cornerback Leonard Moore and safeties Adon Shuler and Brauntae Johnson helped lead the Irish to the nation's No. 10 scoring defense (17.6 points per game). Notre Dame's 21 interceptions in 12 games were the fourth-most nationally.

A pair of defensive tackle transfers — powerful Francis Brewu (Pitt) and 6-foot-5, 330-pound Tionne Gray (Oregon) — join forces with returnees Jason Onye and Elijah Hughes. Defensive end Boubacar Traore is set for national acclaim, while Bryce Young should be ready to put it all together. Alabama transfer Keon Keeley, who was committed to Notre Dame before signing with the Crimson Tide, has returned to the Irish fold.

SPECIALISTS After two seasons of inconsistency, the Irish hope to stabilize their placekicking with former Purdue standout Spencer Porath, who converted 15-of-17 field goals in 2025. For the second time in three years, the Irish have turned to an Australian punter — this time, Jasper Scaife.

FINAL ANALYSIS Since their College Football Playoff snub, Notre Dame and head coach Marcus Freeman have been on the "Leave No Doubt" tour. Freeman has been relentless in his approach to get his players dialed in to right the wrong of last season. "I need to say, 'keep the pain' to get them to remember why we have to struggle and why we have to sacrifice," Freeman says. "Nothing great is achieved if you don't have that edge, that motivation to struggle and sacrifice. We have that edge." The Irish also have a favorable schedule and the firepower to run the table in the regular season.



CJ CARR

SCOUTING THE FIGHTING IRISH

"I would imagine that they take the cuffs off [quarterback CJ Carr] a little more. I thought he was very good last year, but I also thought that they asked little of him. Create isolation routes, get the ball to the right guy. Indiana did the same thing — ran the ball, created one-on-ones and took advantage of them. And [Carr] is more talented than Fernando Mendoza. That's saying a lot. ... They're so good up front that they just get after your a–. It's just hard to match up with them because you can't stop them from running the football because of how good they are up front. You put the whole team up there, and then you're gonna create one-on-ones, and they have a few receivers that they haven't had the last few years."

— An opposing assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

		OFFENSE (7)		
WR	6	**JORDAN FAISON (SR.)**	3	Mylan Graham* (So.)
WR	1	**JADEN GREATHOUSE (JR.)**	17	Elijah Burress (Fr.)
WR	14	Micah Gilbert (So.)	0	Quincy Porter* (So.)
LT	74	Will Black (Fr.)	71	Styles Prescod (So.)
LG	54	**ANTHONIE KNAPP (JR.)**	56	Charles Jagusah (Jr.)
C	70	**ASHTON CRAIG (SR.)**	64	**JOE OTTING (JR.)**
RG	75	Sullivan Absher (Jr.)	58	Matty Augustine (Fr.)
RT	76	**GUERBY LAMBERT (SO.)**	78	Owen Strebig (Fr.)
TE	87	Cooper Flanagan (Jr.)	7	Ty Washington (Sr.)
QB	13	**CJ CARR (SO.)**	10	Noah Grubbs (Fr.)
RB	22	Aneyas Williams (Jr.)	2	Nolan James Jr. (Fr.)
		DEFENSE (8)		
DE	5	**BOUBACAR TRAORE (JR.)**	10	Loghan Thomas (Jr.)
DT	47	**JASON ONYE (SR.)**	0	Tionne Gray* (So.)
DT	7	Francis Brewu* (Jr.)	56	Elijah Hughes (Sr.)
DE	95	Bryce Young (Jr.)	11	Keon Keeley* (Jr.)
ILB	34	**DRAYK BOWEN (SR.)**	4	**JAIDEN AUSBERRY (JR.)**
ILB	27	Kyngstonn Viliamu-Asa (Jr.)	3	Jaylen Sneed (Sr.)
CB	15	**LEONARD MOORE (JR.)**	12	Jayden Sanders* (So.)
CB		DJ McKinney* (Sr.)	24	Mark Zackery IV (So.)
NB	29	**CHRISTIAN GRAY (SR.)**	1	Dallas Golden (So.)
S	8	**ADON SHULER (JR.)**	22	Ethan Long (Fr.)
S	9	**BRAUNTAE JOHNSON (SO.)**	28	Luke Talich (Sr.)
		SPECIALISTS		
K	35	Spencer Porath* (Jr.)	KR 22	Aneyas Williams (Jr.)
P	39	Jasper Scaife (Fr.)	PR 6	Jordan Faison (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

2025 RESULTS (10-2)

Aug. 31	at Miami (Fla.)	L	24-27
Sept. 13	Texas A&M	L	40-41
Sept. 20	Purdue	W	56-30
Sept. 27	at Arkansas	W	56-13
Oct. 4	Boise State	W	28-7
Oct. 11	NC State	W	36-7
Oct. 18	USC	W	34-24
Nov. 1	at Boston College	W	25-10
Nov. 8	Navy	W	49-10
Nov. 15	at Pitt	W	37-15
Nov. 22	Syracuse	W	70-7
Nov. 29	at Stanford	W	49-20

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 6	vs. Wisconsin #
Sept. 12	Rice
Sept. 19	Michigan State
Sept. 26	at Purdue
Oct. 3	at North Carolina
Oct. 10	Stanford
Oct. 17	at BYU
Oct. 31	vs. Navy %
Nov. 7	Miami (Fla.)
Nov. 14	Boston College
Nov. 21	SMU
Nov. 28	at Syracuse

#Green Bay, WI %Foxborough, MA

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Grayson McKeogh, OT	★★★★★
2.	Rodney Dunham, EDGE	★★★★★
3.	Khary Adams, CB	★★★★★
4.	Joey O'Brien, S	★★★★★
5.	Ian Premer, TE	★★★★★
6.	Ayden Pouncey, CB	★★★★
7.	Ebenezer Ewetade, EDGE	★★★★
8.	Jonaz Walton, RB	★★★★
9.	Kaydon Finley, WR	★★★★
10.	Javian Osborne, RB	★★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Marcus Freeman • Record at School: 43-12 (4+ years) • Career Record: 43-12 (4+ years) • Offensive Coordinator: Mike Denbrock • Defensive Coordinator: Chris Ash • Location: South Bend, Ind. • Stadium: Notre Dame Stadium (77,622)

MICHAEL CATERINA-IMAGN IMAGES

SHAMAR PORTER

SCOUTING THE HUSKIES

"[New UConn coach] Jason Candle did a great job at Toledo. Year in, year out, they were competing for the MAC Championship. It should be a smoother transition because a lot of the guys that they were recruiting in the MAC, they should be able to recruit at UConn. I absolutely know that they'll have a bigger budget, so they'll be able to take what they had done and sell it on top of what [previous head coach Jim L. Mora] was able to do at UConn during his tenure, so I don't think it'll be as big of a challenge for them to get back to where they want to be. ... There'll be some hiccups, but I just think Candle's done it for a long time at this point, so that transition will be smoother."

— An opposing assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (1)

WR	11	Ryder Treadway* (Fr.)	0	Ky Wilson* (Jr.)
WR	2	Jediyah Willoughby* (So.)	8	Zy'marion Lang* (So.)
WR	5	Shamar Porter (Jr.)	19	Javon Brown* (Fr.)
LT	76	Dominic Rivera* (So.)	78	Isiah Switzer* (Fr.)
LG	55	Andrew Laurich* (So.)	73	Raphael Greene-Nyarko* (Fr.)
C	58	Terrence Moore* (Sr.)	52	Deron McLaughlin (So.)
RG	**69**	**TY CHAN (SR.)**	62	Ben Mulholland* (Fr.)
RT	79	Christian Richter* (Jr.)	59	Finn Wilkins (So.)
TE	86	Matt Ragan* (Jr.)	80	Alex Godavitarne* (Jr.)
QB	4	Jake Merklinger* (Fr.)	7	Kalieb Osborne* (Fr.)
RB	6	Trey Cornist* (So.)	3	Kenji Christian* (Jr.)

DEFENSE (0)

DE	11	Avery Dunn* (Jr.)	52	Joshua Mickens* (Jr.)
DT	3	Esean Carter* (Sr.)	95	Melvin Hills III* (Fr.)
DT	2	Tahjae Mullix* (Sr.)	14	Desmond Aladuge* (So.)
DE	15	Anas Luqman* (Jr.)	94	Matt Hoffman (Sr.)
LB	44	John Lista* (Sr.)	18	Kylish Hicks (Sr.)
LB	0	K'Von Sherman* (Jr.)	5	Rickey Williams* (Fr.)
LB	20	Luke Murphy* (Sr.)	9	Zakaih Saez* (So.)
CB	10	Jayden Davis* (Jr.)	6	Renick Dorilas* (Fr.)
CB	7	Tyler McKinstry* (So.)	28	Elijah Whitaker (Fr.)
S	4	Braedyn Moore* (So.)	21	Tracy Revels* (So.)
S	13	Jayden Price* (Fr.)	23	Steve Miller* (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	89	Mike Baker* (Fr.)	KR	9	Julian Allen* (So.)
P	35	Spencer Sullins (Fr.)	PR	9	Julian Allen* (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

GREGORY FISHER-IMAGN IMAGES

UCONN HUSKIES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 103 | 2025 RECORD: 9-4

OFFENSE After a historic year for UConn offensively — its first ever with a 3,000-yard passer (Joe Fagnano), a 1,000-yard receiver (Skyler Bell) and a 1,000-yard rusher (Cam Edwards) — new head coach Jason Candle had to start from scratch. He's done so with a base of players who followed him from Toledo, including quarterback Kalieb Osborne, who is likely to compete with Tennessee transfer Jake Merklinger for the starting job, and running back Kenji Christian, who will be part of a room that includes Trey Cornist from Central Michigan and Cyncir Bowers from West Virginia.

Candle has said that he hopes to have an offense that will take shots down the field, and that should be a possibility with receivers like Ky "Flash" Wilson from FCS Youngstown State and Toledo transfers Jediyah Willoughby and Ryder Treadway. Shamar Porter is one of the few returners and provides a big target down the field.

The offensive line, with guard Ty Chan returning, is largely made up of players who helped Toledo tie for 17th nationally in sacks allowed last season.

DEFENSE The Huskies' strength under new defensive coordinator Ryan Manalac figures to be at the linebacker position, which he coached for the past five seasons at Pitt. K'Von Sherman, who had 94 tackles and 4.5 sacks last year at Toledo, figures to lead an experienced group that includes FCS Penn transfer John Lista and Luke Murphy from Coastal Carolina.

Esean Carter, another former Rocket, headlines the defensive line in his senior season and is joined by a handful of players who have waited for their opportunity, such as Joshua Mickens from Ohio State and Tahjae Mullix from Oregon State. The defensive backfield is less experienced, with a number of players, like junior safety Braedyn Moore, competing for their first full-time role in college.

SPECIALISTS The Huskies have brought in Mike Baker to kick after he spent his first two seasons as a backup at Ole Miss, only attempting and making four extra points. Spencer Sullins, who started his career at Memphis, and Australian Tommy Warner, who started his career at FCS Northwest Missouri State, are competing for the punter spot. Julian Allen, a former Toledo receiver, took most of the return reps in the Huskies' spring game, but that role has yet to be determined.

FINAL ANALYSIS UConn brought in more than 70 new players and almost an entirely new staff, but there is optimism around the program that Candle, who never had a losing season in 10 years at Toledo, will be successful in Year 1. That might not mean a third-straight nine-win season, but the foundation is there for the Huskies to remain competitive.

2025 RESULTS (9-4)

Aug. 30	Central Conn. State	W	59-13
Sept. 6	at Syracuse (ot)	L	20-27
Sept. 13	at Delaware (ot)	L	41-44
Sept. 20	Ball State	W	31-25
Sept. 27	at Buffalo	W	20-17
Oct. 4	FIU	W	51-10
Oct. 18	at Boston College	W	38-23
Oct. 25	at Rice (ot)	L	34-37
Nov. 1	UAB	W	38-19
Nov. 8	Duke	W	37-34
Nov. 15	Air Force	W	26-16
Nov. 22	at Florida Atlantic	W	48-45
Dec. 27	vs. Army #	L	16-41

#Fenway Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	Lafayette
Sept. 12	Maryland
Sept. 19	at Southern Miss
Sept. 26	at Miami (Ohio)
Oct. 3	Syracuse
Oct. 10	at Temple
Oct. 24	UMass
Oct. 31	at Air Force
Nov. 7	North Carolina
Nov. 14	James Madison
Nov. 21	Old Dominion
Nov. 28	at Wyoming

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Jackson Mangham, TE	★★★★
2.	James Tilus, EDGE	★★★
3.	Owen Winder, OT	★★★
4.	Makijah Latiker, DL	★★★
5.	Zikhere Leaks, WR	★★★
6.	Jayden Jones, LB	★★★
7.	Cason Dash, CB	★★★
8.	Shmar Akande, CB	★★★
9.	Rodarion Tellez, EDGE	★★★
10.	Grant Blascak, S	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Jason Candle • Record at School: First Season
Career Record: 81-44 (10+ years) • Offensive Coordinator: Nunzio Campanile
Defensive Coordinator: Ryan Manalac • Location: Storrs, Conn.
Stadium: Pratt & Whitney Stadium at Rentschler Field (36,000)

MAC PREVIEW

PREDICTED ORDER OF FINISH

1	MIAMI (OHIO)	REDHAWKS
2	WESTERN MICHIGAN	BRONCOS
3	CENTRAL MICHIGAN	CHIPPEWAS
4	TOLEDO	ROCKETS
5	OHIO	BOBCATS
6	BUFFALO	BULLS
7	BOWLING GREEN	FALCONS
8	EASTERN MICHIGAN	EAGLES
9	AKRON	ZIPS
10	KENT STATE	GOLDEN FLASHES
11	BALL STATE	CARDINALS
12	SACRAMENTO STATE	HORNETS
13	UMASS	MINUTEMEN

MAC CHAMPIONSHIP

MIAMI (OHIO) OVER WESTERN MICHIGAN

ALL-MAC TEAM

FIRST-TEAM OFFENSE

QB	BROC LOWRY	Western Michigan
RB	JORDAN GANT	Akron
RB	JALEN BUCKLEY	Western Michigan
AP	RODNEY NELSON	Miami (Ohio)
WR	MARCEL WILLIAMS	Akron
WR	LANGSTON LEWIS	Central Michigan
WR	NICK DEVEREAUX	Eastern Michigan
TE	JOSHUA LONG	Eastern Michigan
C	NICHOLAS GALLEGOS	Eastern Michigan
OL	ERIC SMITH	Miami (Ohio)
OL	EVAN MALCORE	Miami (Ohio)
OL	STEPHEN GALES	Toledo
OL	CHAD SCHUSTER	Western Michigan

FIRST-TEAM DEFENSE

DL	ANDREW ZOCK	Toledo
DL	BAI JOBE	Miami (Ohio)
DL	SCOOP GARDNER JR.	Western Michigan
DL	CARTER EVANS	Eastern Michigan
LB	CJ YOUNG	Miami (Ohio)
LB	TYLER MARTIN	UMass
LB	BLAYNE MYRICK	Miami (Ohio)
LB	DORIAN PRINGLE	Bowling Green
CB	JOSHUA FRANKLIN	Western Michigan
CB	MYCHAL YHARBROUGH	Miami (Ohio)
S	BRYCE LLEWELLYN	Eastern Michigan
S	DJ WALKER	Ohio

FIRST-TEAM SPECIALISTS

K	REICE GRIFFITH	Toledo
P	PIERSE STAINTON	Miami (Ohio)
KR	DA'REALYST CLARK	Kent State
PR	BRYSON HAMMER	Toledo

BOWL PROJECTIONS

Cure: Western Michigan vs. East Carolina

Famous Idaho Potato: Toledo vs. North Dakota State

Boca Raton: Miami (Ohio) vs. Troy

Frisco: Central Michigan vs. Louisiana Tech

Arizona: Ohio vs. Air Force

JOIN COLLEGE FOOTBALL EXPERT STEVEN LASSAN AT ATHLONSPORTS.COM FOR A LOOK AT SECOND- AND THIRD-TEAM SELECTIONS

COORDINATOR CAROUSEL

BOWLING GREEN
Offense: New: Greg Nosal
Old: Travis Partridge
Defense: New: Joe Bowden
Old: Brandon Fisher

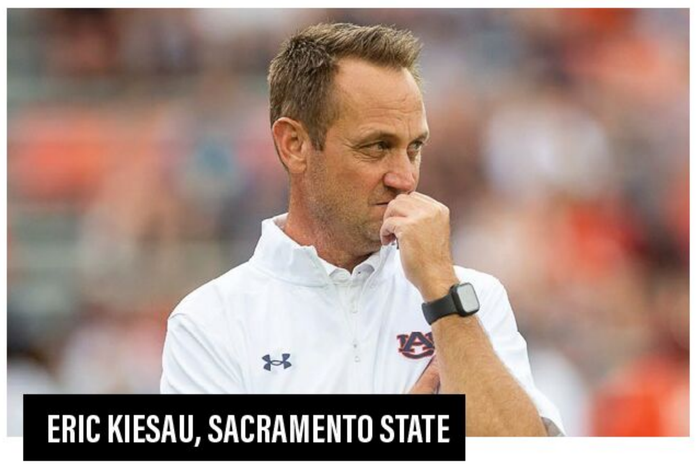
BUFFALO
Offense: New: Tony Tokarz
Old: Dave Patenaude
Defense: New: Brian Dougherty
Old: Joe Bowen

EASTERN MICHIGAN
Defense: New: Kasey Teegardin, Tate Omli; Old: Ben Needham

MIAMI (OHIO)
Offense: New: Gus Ragland
Old: Pat Welsh

OHIO
Defense: New: Kurt Mattix
Old: John Hauser

SACRAMENTO STATE
Offense: New: Eric Kiesau, Eric Scott
Old: Kenneth Merchant
Defense: New: Adam Clark, Kenwick Thompson; Old: Marcus Patton

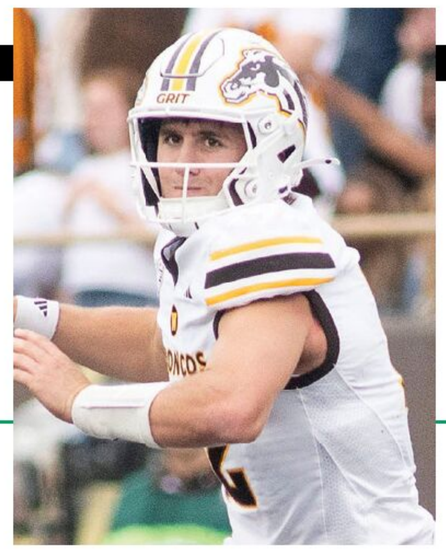


ERIC KIESAU, SACRAMENTO STATE

TOLEDO
Offense: New: Cris Reisert
Old: Mike Hallett, Robert Weiner
Defense: New: Jahmal Brown
Old: Vince Kehres

UMASS
Offense: New: Max Warner
Old: Mike Bajakian

WESTERN MICHIGAN
Defense: New: Greer Martini, Seth Payne; Old: Chris O'Leary



BROC LOWRY, WESTERN MICHIGAN

MYCHAL YHARBROUGH, MIAMI (OHIO)

TOP TRANSFERS

	NAME	POS.	SCHOOL	FORMER SCHOOL
1.	**Andrew Zock**	DL	Toledo	Mercer
	Zock is a disruptive pass-rusher who was the best defender at the FCS level last season.			
2.	**Austin Novosad**	QB	Bowling Green	Oregon
	The former blue-chip recruit spent years in one of the best QB rooms in the nation.			
3.	**CJ Miller**	RB	Toledo	Mercer
	Miller tallied more than 1,200 yards from scrimmage on his way to all-conference honors.			
4.	**Reese Poffenbarger**	QB	Akron	North Texas
	The well-traveled Poffenbarger is a few years removed from leading the FCS in passing.			
5.	**Adjatay Dabbs**	WR	Toledo	Mercer
	Dabbs is a decorated deep threat who followed head coach Mike Jacobs to the MAC.			
6.	**Rodney Nelson**	RB	Miami (Ohio)	Monmouth
	Nelson finished third in the FCS with more than 1,800 rushing yards in 2025.			
7.	**Vaughn Blue**	RB	Central Michigan	Liberty
	Efficient for the Flames in spurts, Blue is ready to handle a larger workload.			
8.	**Braydon Bennett**	RB	Eastern Michigan	Virginia Tech
	Bennett, a seventh-year senior, is a dynamic pass-catching threat out of the backfield.			
9.	**Matt Vezza**	QB	Ohio	New Hampshire
	Vezza's mobility will be a bonus as he adjusts to life in the FBS.			
10.	**William Watson III**	QB	UMass	Virginia Tech
	Watson has shown enough promise to invigorate the lowest-scoring team in the country.			

RECRUITING RANKINGS BY SCHOOL

1. Bowling Green (80)
2. Central Michigan (85)
3. Miami (Ohio) (88)
4. Eastern Michigan (97)
5. Buffalo (102)
6. Ohio (105)
7. Kent State (111)
8. Ball State (114)
9. Western Michigan (116)
10. UMass (117)
11. Toledo (125)
12. Sacramento State (126)
13. Akron (132)

Rankings per Rivals; National ranking in parentheses

GAMES TO WATCH

Sept. 19 Miami (Ohio) at Cincinnati
Sept. 26 Boise State at W. Michigan
Oct. 17 W. Michigan at C. Michigan
Oct. 24 Miami (Ohio) at C. Michigan
Oct. 24 W. Michigan at Toledo
Nov. 3 Buffalo at Miami (Ohio)
Nov. 4 C. Michigan vs. E. Michigan (Detroit)
Nov. 10 Ohio at Miami (Ohio)
Nov. 17 E. Michigan at W. Michigan
Nov. 18 Bowling Green at Toledo
Nov. 24 Miami (Ohio) at W. Michigan
Nov. 27 Toledo at Ohio

TOP 10 RECRUITS

	NAME	POS.	SCHOOL	RATING	NAT. RANK
1.	Malachi Ervin	EDGE	Buffalo	★★★	534
2.	Kentrell White	TE	Bowling Green	★★★	772
3.	Brandon Jenkins	ATH	Ohio	★★★	811
4.	Chase Enlow	RB	Buffalo	★★★	826
5.	Tayshon Bardo	WR	Ball State	★★★	994
6.	Elijah Durham-Smith	EDGE	Bowling Green	★★★	1044
7.	Qur'an McNeill	QB	Buffalo	★★★	1055
8.	Travis Robertson	OT	Bowling Green	★★★	1159
9.	Sharard Vaughn III	LB	Toledo	★★★	1160
10.	Jarin Mock	QB	Bowling Green	★★★	1188

Rankings per Rivals industry ranking

FROM LEFT: JAKE CRANDALL; BECCA MAHON/BATTLE CREEK ENQUIRE; MARK J. REBILAS-IMAGN IMAGES

AKRON ZIPS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 125 | MAC PREDICTION: 9 | 2025 RECORD: 5-7, 4-4 MAC

OFFENSE Akron is handing the offense over to transfer quarterback Reese Poffenbarger, who has served as a backup to Cam Ward at Miami (Fla.) and Drew Mestemaker at North Texas the past two seasons. He was very productive at FCS UAlbany, throwing for 60 touchdowns and running for another eight when he started in 2022 and '23, averaging 3,306 yards passing and completing 60% of his passes.

Poffenbarger will have experience at the skill positions around him. Fifth-year senior Jordan Gant returns after rushing for 1,032 yards in his first season following his transfer from FCS Tennessee State. He earned second-team All-MAC honors. Backup Sean Patrick is also back after averaging 6.9 carries per game as a freshman.

Two of Akron's top three receivers are also back. Marcel Williams (641 yards) and Kyan Mason (481) combined for more than 1,000 receiving yards a year ago. Williams is an All-MAC candidate on the outside, and Mason does his damage from the slot with his shifty athleticism.

The offensive line has seven players returning who were at a minimum rotational players, and the unit has also added some transfers.

DEFENSE The secondary is the strength of a unit that was ninth in the MAC in scoring defense last season. Rodrick Hunter and Terence Thomas are names to watch, and the coaches are high on Aamii Branch at nickel. The hope is that former Oregon transfer Daymon David will return from injury to man a safety spot.

Jason Hocker takes over at middle linebacker after seeing action in five games last year. The Frazier twins, Dahvon and Jahvon, return along the defensive line and will provide support for Cyrus Durham, who will start again after a productive sophomore season. Jon'Trell Mixon and Ronald Hull were rotational players last season and give the defense needed experience.

SPECIALISTS Both placekicker Matthew Schramm and punter Joseph Castle return. Schramm made 12-of-13 field goals, including 4-of-5 from beyond 40, after taking over the job early in the season. Castle averaged 42.9 yards per punt and had a long of 68 yards. Patrick will again be the primary punt returner.

FINAL ANALYSIS Akron's bowl ban for poor APR scores has been lifted, and making the postseason is a reachable goal for the Zips. Poffenbarger impressed in the spring and will be productive if the offensive line can come together. The schedule has three tough non-conference games in UNLV, Wake Forest and Minnesota, and no Sacramento State in league play, which probably makes six wins the ceiling for the Zips.

2025 RESULTS (5-7, 4-4 MAC)

Aug. 28	Wyoming	L	0-10
Sept. 6	at Nebraska	L	0-68
Sept. 13	at UAB	L	28-31
Sept. 20	Duquesne	W	51-7
Sept. 27	at Toledo	L	3-45
Oct. 4	Central Michigan	W	28-22
Oct. 11	Miami (Ohio)	L	7-20
Oct. 18	at Ball State	L	28-42
Oct. 25	at Buffalo	W	24-16
Nov. 4	UMass	W	44-10
Nov. 11	Kent State (ot)	L	35-42
Nov. 18	at Bowling Green	W	19-16

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 3	at Wake Forest
Sept. 12	Robert Morris
Sept. 19	at Minnesota
Sept. 26	UNLV
Oct. 3	at Central Michigan
Oct. 10	Eastern Michigan
Oct. 17	at Miami (Ohio)
Oct. 24	at Kent State
Nov. 3	Ohio
Nov. 10	Western Michigan
Nov. 18	at UMass
Nov. 27	Buffalo

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1. Savion Lewis, CB ★★★
2. Semaj Beals, QB ★★★
3. Elzea Rollins, IOL ★★★
4. Lorvens Barthelemy, IOL ★★★
5. Daunte Curtis, LB ★★★
6. Jasun Ridley, DL ★★★
7. Henry Perrymond, CB ★★★
8. Jaborree Riggins, WR ★★★
9. Gentz Hilburn, WR ★★★
10. Daxton Christman-Gourley, OT ★★★

**Per Rivals*

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Joe Moorhead • Record at School: 13-35 (4 years) • Career Record: 65-60 (10 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Joe Moorhead • Defensive Coordinator: Tim Tibesar • Location: Akron, Ohio • Stadium: InfoCision Stadium–Summa Field (30,000)

JORDAN GANT

SCOUTING THE ZIPS

"Like a lot of other MAC teams, they lost some serious production to the transfer portal, especially up front. But they've got a second-team all-conference receiver, Marcel Williams, back and [Jordan Gant] is back after he ran for over 1,000 yards, so they have some returners there who have played significant snaps. ... They've got a quarterback competition, and obviously, they've still got [head coach] Joe Moorhead calling plays, so you feel pretty confident about where that's headed. You've seen the progression of the offense the last couple years. There are some holes up front that have to be filled on both sides of the ball, but for a Group of 6, I think they're a little bit better off than they've been in the past as far as losing guys that produced."

— An opposing MAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)

WR	2	**MARCEL WILLIAMS (SO.)**	12	Cameron Monteiro (So.)
WR	3	Kyan Mason (So.)	16	Paul Davis (So.)
WR	81	Luke Sivon (Fr.)	8	Brandon Hills (Jr.)
LT	75	Dayne Shor (Jr.)	57	Ian Falkner* (Sr.)
LG	55	Amarie Archer (Sr.)	79	Nick Stopiak (Sr.)
C	72	**COLIN LYONS (SR.)**	62	Max Mobley (Jr.)
RG	58	Alex Fox (Sr.)	52	Nate Hampton* (Fr.)
RT	50	**ALLEN JONES JR. (SR.)**	68	Jonathan Gould (Fr.)
TE	85	Conner Cravaack (Jr.)	83	Elijah Alexander* (So.)
QB	7	Reese Poffenbarger* (Sr.)	6	Brayden Roggow (So.)
RB	22	**JORDAN GANT (SR.)**	13	Sean Patrick (So.)

DEFENSE (2)

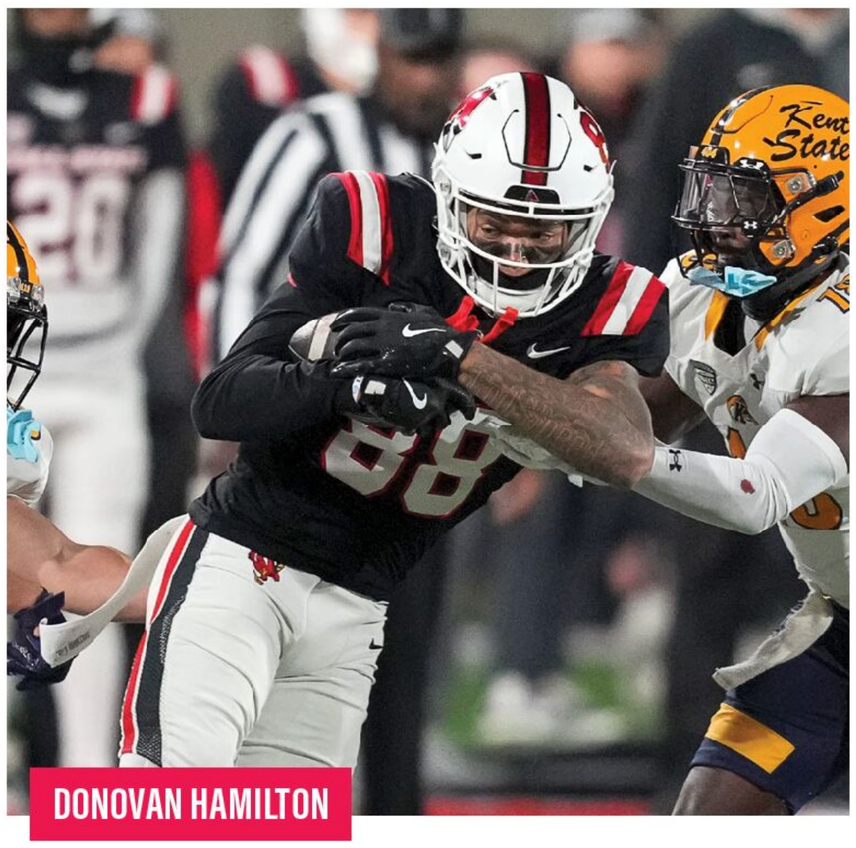
DE	10	**CYRUS DURHAM (JR.)**	50	Jahvon Frazier (So.)
NG	97	Jon'Trell Mixon (Jr.)	99	Jaiden Brown-Demery (Fr.)
DT	5	**RONALD HULL (JR.)**	95	Vann Kavals (Fr.)
RUSH	16	Dahvon Frazier (So.)	93	Ty Watkins (Fr.)
LB	25	Jason Hocker (So.)	45	Devin Reeves (Fr.)
LB	31	Gavin James (Fr.)	18	Dwight Nunoo* (Sr.)
CB	21	Catrell White (Jr.)	27	Keyveon Johnson (So.)
CB	15	Terence Thomas (Sr.)	17	Caiden Newsome* (Jr.)
NB	9	Aamii Branch (Jr.)	12	Iesa Jarmon (Sr.)
S	2	Daymon David (Sr.)	6	Jamari Somerville (Jr.)
S	13	Rodrick Hunter (So.)	20	Mehki Flowers (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	47	Matthew Schramm (So.)	KR	15	Terence Thomas (Sr.)
P	95	Joseph Castle (Sr.)	PR	13	Sean Patrick (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

MIKE CARDEW



DONOVAN HAMILTON

AARON DOSTER-IMAGN IMAGES

SCOUTING THE CARDINALS

"[Head coach] Mike Uremovich has been in that conference before, going back to his time at Northern Illinois. It's a hard place to recruit to. [Former head coach] Mike Neu took it as far as he possibly could take it. ... They need to either have freshmen and sophomores who can play right away and have some sort of success in a year, or you have to have guys who are committed to staying that are fourth- and fifth-year guys who are just playing against guys that are younger than them and they can sustain a whole season. No one is really going to poach from Ball State, but they're also having to go out and recruit the FCS level and get those guys to be able to play. They have a really good group of coaches that I know will get their guys to play at a high level."

— An opposing MAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)

WR	1	**DONOVAN HAMILTON (SO.)**	14	Elisha Durham (So.)
WR	10	Jamarion McDougle (Sr.)	7	CJ Nelson* (Sr.)
WR	11	Isaiah Thacker (Jr.)	5	Jabari Smith Jr.* (Jr.)
LT	66	**CHRIS HOOD (SR.)**	62	Sam Spicer (Fr.)
LG	75	Zach Bandy (So.)	77	Misael Sandoval* (Jr.)
C	73	**COLE MOSIER (JR.)**	68	Grant Haworth (So.)
RG	56	Jacob Jeudy* (Sr.)	61	Luke Dalton (Sr.)
RT	70	**TRISTAN COOK (SO.)**	71	Brady Barrowman (Fr.)
TE	84	**TATE HOOVER (JR.)**	8	Mason Riggins (Fr.)
QB	6	Keldric Luster* (Jr.)	9	Tyler Mizzell* (Jr.)
RB	4	TJ Horton (Jr.)	2	Jalen Bonds (Fr.)

DEFENSE (1)

EDGE	7	Ben Marsh (Jr.)	10	Austin Stief* (Sr.)
NG	54	Spencer Vaka (Jr.)	95	Keilan Smith* (Jr.)
DT	56	Ameir Glenn (So.)	99	Kendrick Gilbert* (Jr.)
RUSH	31	Jared Badie* (Sr.)	42	Layton Starks (So.)
LB	25	Mikeah Webster (Fr.)	30	Gavin Forsha* (Sr.)
LB	6	Cincear Lewis* (Sr.)	16	Kaleb Stewart* (So.)
SNIPER	45	Cole Earlewine (Jr.)	28	Stone Perkins (Fr.)
CB	4	**WILLIZHUAN YATES (JR.)**	23	Jordan Suggs (So.)
CB	0	DJ Fields (Jr.)	11	Donovan Lanier (Fr.)
S	12	Deondre Shepherd (So.)	28	Stone Perkins (Fr.)
S	1	Sterling Smith* (Jr.)	13	Kamron Chamble (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	98	Carson Holmer (Sr.)	KR	4 TJ Horton (Jr.)
P	92	Cole Stumbaugh (So.)	PR	4 Willizhuan Yates (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

BALL STATE CARDINALS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 135 | MAC PREDICTION: 11 | 2025 RECORD: 4-8, 3-5 MAC

OFFENSE The Cardinals have two transfers arriving to play quarterback, and there is a chance both will play under second-year head coach Mike Uremovich. Keldric Luster is on his third stop after SMU and Texas State and is looking to get on the field consistently for the first time. Luster is a dual threat and has the arm to make Ball State more of a passing offense than it was last year, when it threw only 33% of the time. Tyler Mizzell went from Wake Forest to Division II Concord University (W.Va.). He is more of a pass-first QB but still has mobility.

The wide receiver room is deeper and faster than a year ago. Donovan Hamilton is a potential All-MAC player after finishing second on the team with 244 receiving yards on 20 catches. Transfers CJ Nelson, Jabari Smith Jr., DJ Young and Corey Thompson Jr. give BSU smaller, quicker threats in the slots.

The offensive line returns starters at center and both tackles, with right tackle Tristan Cook a potential All-MAC candidate. The offensive line is the strongest unit on offense.

Running backs TJ Horton (60 carries, 180 yards) and Jalen Bonds return, with the more physical Bonds coming off a pair of starts at the end of the season.

DEFENSE The defense has an influx of transfers who will determine if the unit can rise from No. 10 in the MAC. Rush end Jared Badie arrives from San Diego State after playing with Illinois out of high school. He is expected to make an immediate impact in his only season at Ball State.

Cornerback Willizhuan Yates is a three-year starter and the team's top player in coverage. DJ Fields is moving from safety to corner after racking up 34 tackles a year ago. Deondre Shepherd has starting experience at safety, and hopes are high for incoming Purdue transfer Sterling Smith.

The defensive line needs players who were reserves last season to step up. Ameir Glenn and Ben Marsh were rotational players, and Spencer Vaka will be elevated at the nose guard spot.

SPECIALISTS Senior Carson Holmer will be given a shot as the placekicker again. He won the job last spring but lost it as he struggled early in the season, going just 3-for-7 on field goals with a long of 23 yards. Cole Stumbaugh will be the punter.

FINAL ANALYSIS There are too many unproven areas to project the Cardinals to get to a bowl for the first time since 2021. The hope is that one of the quarterbacks will own the position behind a stout offensive line. Defensively, the secondary has potential, and the linebackers have some difference-makers, but the Cardinals may have difficulty winning up front.

2025 RESULTS (4-8, 3-5 MAC)

Aug. 30	at Purdue	L	0-31
Sept. 6	at Auburn	L	3-42
Sept. 13	New Hampshire	W	34-29
Sept. 20	at UConn	L	25-31
Oct. 4	Ohio	W	20-14
Oct. 11	at Western Michigan	L	0-42
Oct. 18	Akron	W	42-28
Oct. 25	at Northern Illinois	L	7-21
Nov. 5	Kent State	W	17-13
Nov. 15	Eastern Michigan	L	9-24
Nov. 22	at Toledo	L	9-38
Nov. 29	at Miami (Ohio)	L	24-45

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	at Ohio State
Sept. 12	Stony Brook
Sept. 19	at Liberty
Sept. 26	at Kent State
Oct. 3	Toledo
Oct. 10	at Northwestern
Oct. 17	at Bowling Green
Oct. 24	Sacramento State
Nov. 4	at UMass
Nov. 11	Buffalo
Nov. 17	at Ohio
Nov. 28	Central Michigan

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Tayshon Bardo, WR	★★★
2.	Mark Hanniford, WR	★★★
3.	Mason Atkins, QB	★★★
4.	Stone Perkins, CB	★★★
5.	Brady Weber, OT	★★★
6.	Zyon Hill, S	★★★
7.	Dominic Infelise, DL	★★★
8.	Ace Cooper, WR	★★★
9.	Nolan Cicero, OT	★★★
10.	Evan Downer, EDGE	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Mike Uremovich • Record at School: 4-8 (1 year) • Career Record: 60-64 (11 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Mike Uremovich • Defensive Coordinator: Jeff Knowles • Location: Muncie, Ind. • Stadium: Scheumann Stadium (22,500)

BOWLING GREEN FALCONS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 122 | MAC PREDICTION: 7 | 2025 RECORD: 4-8, 2-6 MAC

OFFENSE Oregon transfer Austin Novosad finally gets the chance to start after being QB2 behind Bo Nix, Dillon Gabriel and Dante Moore for the Ducks. The former highly regarded 4-star recruit is mobile and has a strong arm. He was in competition with Div. II Assumption transfer Jay Kastantin in the spring, but expect Novosad to be the guy in the fall.

The Falcons ran the ball 62% of the time, and if that ratio holds, expect Austyn Dendy to get a lot of work. The former Missouri running back came on strong at the tail end of 2025, rushing for 100-plus yards in three straight games. He is BG's leading returning rusher and has a shot at 1,000 yards if he stays healthy.

The offensive line gets a reboot with all five starters gone. James Thomas Jr. had two starts and played 405 snaps, so his experience will pay dividends at right tackle. Alexis Sanchez was a rotational player at guard.

The top pass-catcher at BGSU the past three years has been a tight end, and sophomore Jeremiah Scoby will have a chance to be that featured player. Wideouts Brennan Ridley and Winn Sharp will move up from reserve roles a year ago.

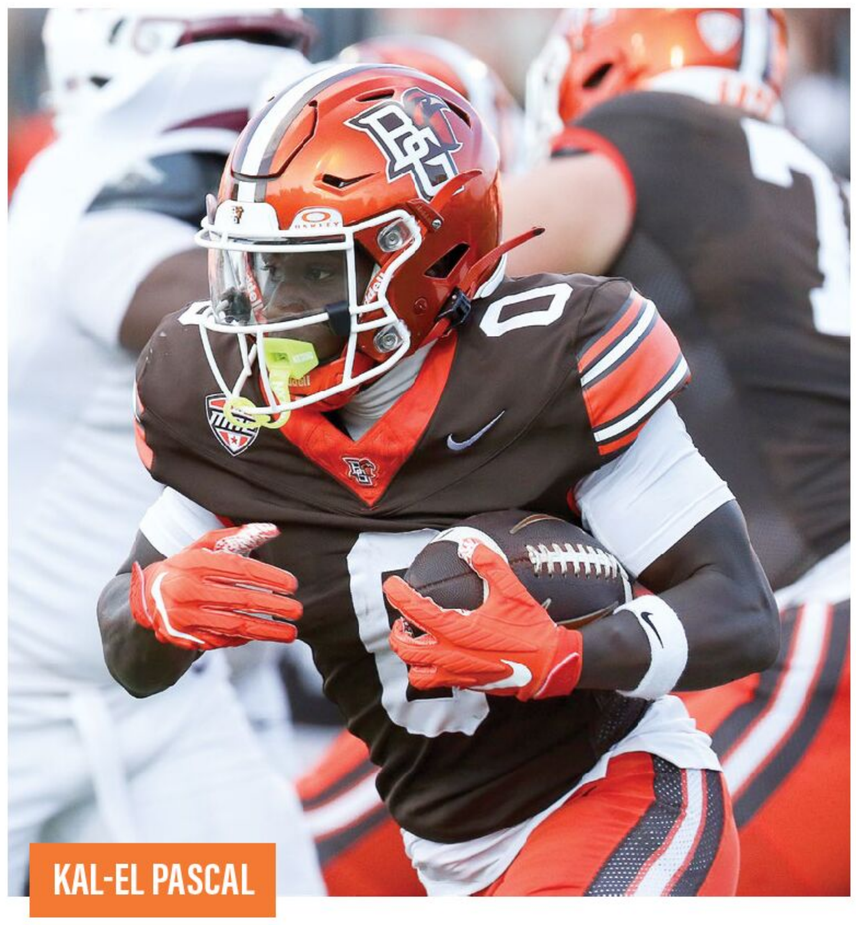
DEFENSE The front six has the potential to be strong for the Falcons. Defensive end Myles Bradley and defensive tackle Eriq George (son of head coach Eddie George) led the team in sacks with five and four, respectively, and will look to increase those numbers this year.

Middle linebacker Dorian Pringle was off to a fast start in 2025 with 27 tackles, two forced fumbles, an interception and a fumble recovery before being lost for the season in Week 3 against Liberty. He has a chance to be an All-MAC player if he can stay healthy. Coaches also have high hopes for Purdue transfer Sanders Ellis.

Safety Kal-El Pascal is the only returning starter in the secondary. He was second on the team with 80 tackles and also recorded an interception and a fumble recovery. Cornerback JoJo Johnson is projected to start after leading the MAC with 13 pass breakups in 2025.

SPECIALISTS The Falcons will depend on walk-on placekicker Travis Kenner, which isn't always ideal. Ryan Kingston averaged 41 yards per punt last season at FCS Southeast Missouri State and was second-team All-OVC.

FINAL ANALYSIS Eddie George enters Year 2 with several unknowns but a potentially elite quarterback in Novosad. The running game has a dependable back, but there are questions along the offensive line. Defensively, the secondary isn't deep, but there are difference-makers in the first two levels. A bowl berth is the ceiling for this squad.



KAL-EL PASCAL

SCOUTING THE FALCONS

"They've got [Oregon transfer quarterback] Austin Novosad. I think in the MAC, if you have a quarterback, you're gonna be pretty good. Especially as long as you have somebody who doesn't turn the ball over. ... They've brought in some transfers who were backups at bigger universities who just maybe got to the point where they had one or two years left in their careers, and they just want to be able to play. They're gonna be a team that could shock some people, just because of the history of Bowling Green the last few years since Dino Babers left to go to Syracuse. But I think they'll be a solid team in the MAC."

— An opposing MAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (1)				
WR	18	Winn Sharp (So.)	32	Nick Sowell* (Jr.)
WR	5	Brennan Ridley (Jr.)	11	Austin Clay (So.)
LT	65	Gabe Funk* (So.)	58	Ethan Kraatz (Fr.)
LG	78	Alexis Sanchez (Sr.)	66	Zane Panchula (Fr.)
C	54	Brody Bolyn (Jr.)	53	Masyn Zahursky (Fr.)
RG	70	Alex Harris (So.)	73	Caden Campbell (So.)
RT	77	James Thomas Jr. (Jr.)	50	Vincent Giordano (Fr.)
TE	86	Jeremiah Scoby (So.)	88	Carsen Melvin (Fr.)
TE	**89**	**BLANE CLEAVER (SR.)**	82	Eli Jacon-Duffy (So.)
QB	16	Austin Novosad* (Jr.)	19	Jay Kastantin* (Jr.)
RB	14	Austyn Dendy (So.)	22	Nakai Amachree (So.)
DEFENSE (2)				
DE	33	Jaimion Olverson (Fr.)		Kade Kostus* (Sr.)
DT	5	Eriq George (Sr.)	54	Dior Garner (Fr.)
DT	88	Selah Brown* (Sr.)	57	Dayln White (Jr.)
DE	23	Myles Bradley (Sr.)	48	Quentin Lewis (Fr.)
LB	12	Sanders Ellis* (Jr.)	35	Cashmire Lewis (Fr.)
MLB	**3**	**DORIAN PRINGLE (SO.)**	18	Andrew Hines III (So.)
LB	44	AJ Odom (Sr.)		Kingston Seals (Fr.)
CB	10	JoJo Johnson (Sr.)	26	Josira Andrews (So.)
CB	41	Drey Braxton* (Jr.)	27	Nick Sawyer* (Sr.)
S	**0**	**KAL-EL PASCAL (JR.)**	31	D'kyah Banks (So.)
S	15	Preston EstoEsta (So.)	19	Jahai Johnson (Fr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	85	Travis Kenner (Jr.)	KR 22	Nakai Amachree (So.)
P	30	Ryan Kingston* (Sr.)	PR 5	Brennan Ridley (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

ISAIAH VAZQUEZ/GETTY IMAGES)

2025 RESULTS (4-8, 2-6 MAC)

Aug. 28	Lafayette	W	26-7
Sept. 6	at Cincinnati	L	20-34
Sept. 13	Liberty	W	23-13
Sept. 20	at Louisville	L	17-40
Sept. 27	at Ohio	L	20-35
Oct. 11	Toledo	W	28-23
Oct. 18	Central Michigan	L	6-27
Oct. 25	at Kent State	L	21-24
Nov. 1	Buffalo	L	3-28
Nov. 8	at Eastern Michigan	L	21-27
Nov. 18	Akron	L	16-19
Nov. 25	at UMass	W	45-14

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	Tarleton State
Sept. 12	at Nebraska
Sept. 19	at Iowa State
Sept. 26	South Florida
Oct. 3	at Miami (Ohio)
Oct. 10	Sacramento State
Oct. 17	Ball State
Oct. 24	at Buffalo
Oct. 31	at W. Michigan
Nov. 10	Kent State
Nov. 18	at Toledo
Nov. 28	UMass

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Elijah Durham-Smith, EDGE	★★★
2.	Derron Gray Jr., TE	★★★
3.	Kentrell White, TE	★★★
4.	Jarin Mock, QB	★★★
5.	Maddox Hunstad, TE	★★★
6.	Pete Pendergest, OT	★★★
7.	Travis Robertson, OT	★★★
8.	Trent Merrell, EDGE	★★★
9.	Pauly Sadler, WR	★★★
10.	Chris Newell Jr., S	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Eddie George • Record at School: 4-8 (1 year) • Career Record: 28-30 (5 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Greg Nosal • Defensive Coordinator: Joe Bowden • Location: Bowling Green, Ohio • Stadium: Doyt L. Perry Stadium (24,000)

TERRANCE SHELTON JR.

SCOUTING THE BULLS

"They lost their defensive coordinator, Joe Bowen, to Pitt, and he was a fantastic defensive coordinator. He's very smart. And they lost their Mike linebacker, Red Murdock. He made the show go for them. They're a solid squad. I just don't know if they have the pieces to still compete in the MAC. ... I know that [head coach] Pete Lembo is awesome. Those guys are gonna win. He just does a good job of managing the game and not overcooking it. ... They're a tough out. Lembo coaches them well. They're a pain in the a– on special teams, and I know they had some quarterback issues in the second half of the season that started that collapse, but I wouldn't count them out of competing for a MAC title."

— An opposing MAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (2)

WR	8	**JASAIAH GATHINGS (SR.)**	11	Dwayne Early Jr. (Fr.)
WR	6	Chance Morrow (Sr.)	1	Phillip Folmar (Fr.)
WR	3	Patrick Clacks III (So.)	84	Tyrell Simmons Jr. (So.)
LT	59	Gabriel Arena (Jr.)	71	Caleb Watts (Fr.)
LG	62	Paul Clark (So.)	78	Joe Crocker* (Jr.)
C	55	Thomas Barr (Fr.)	74	Nino Francavilla* (So.)
RG	**67**	**ALEX HEININGER (SR.)**	69	Jackson Bellamy (So.)
RT	51	Tyrone Davis (So.)	77	Jackson Davenport (Fr.)
TE	86	Michael Gelatko (Fr.)	5	Clint Walker (Sr.)
QB	7	Jason Wright (Fr.)	16	Elijah Holmes* (Jr.)
RB	25	Terrance Shelton Jr. (Jr.)	4	Messiah Burch (Jr.)

DEFENSE (4)

DE	30	Jacari Bennett (So.)	17	Logan Goodwin* (Jr.)
DT	**99**	**CORNELL EVANS (SR.)**	55	Mason Nickel* (So.)
DT	88	Rex Stinchcomb (Fr.)	97	Christopher Climes (Fr.)
DE	11	Will Clark (So.)	15	Sedrick Vessah* (Jr.)
LB	13	Joey Cheshire* (Sr.)	18	George Hill (Fr.)
LB	2	Stevie Bracey* (Sr.)	44	Zach Bergmann* (Sr.)
CB	**0**	**KOBI BLACKWELL (SO.)**	3	Oliver Bridges (Sr.)
CB	**9**	**KEONTEZ BRADLEY (SR.)**	8	Ramari Taylor (So.)
NB	**1**	**SAVEON BROWN (SR.)**	33	Jordan Owens (Jr.)
S	6	Miles Greer (Sr.)	7	John Keough (Jr.)
S	4	Ronnell Davis (So.)	23	Xavier Leonard (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	31	Oliver Hautanen (Fr.)	KR	25	Terrance Shelton Jr. (Jr.)
P	90	Ethan Stumpf (So.)	PR	6	Miles Greer (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

MIKE DINOVO-IMAGN IMAGES

BUFFALO BULLS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 118 | MAC PREDICTION: 6 | 2025 RECORD: 5-7, 4-4 MAC

OFFENSE The Bulls have only two returning starters on an offense that ranked No. 93 nationally in points per game (24.0) last season. At quarterback, Jason Wright is a promising redshirt freshman with good size and athletic ability. He has a high ceiling as a two-way threat, and it will be worth watching how quickly he can pick up new offensive coordinator Tony Tokarz's system.

There is some experience in the backfield with Terrance Shelton Jr., the team's second-leading rusher a year ago (244 yards, one TD) and Messiah Burch, a gadget back who is capable of explosive plays. The wide receiver room lost two All-MAC players to the transfer portal and must be rebuilt. Jasaiah Gathings is the top returner with 410 yards and will be Wright's top target. Chance Morrow is a 6-foot-4 red-zone threat, and Dwayne Early Jr. and Tyrell Simmons Jr. turned heads during the spring.

On the offensive line, only one starter returns in guard Alex Heininger. This is the area with the most questions on offense.

DEFENSE Buffalo's secondary has two experienced corners returning in Kobi Blackwell (seven starts) and Keontez Bradley (six starts), and nickel SaVeon Brown (eight starts) is expected to be the biggest playmaker on the backline. Miles Greer was in the safety rotation a year ago and was third on the team in tackles. The Bulls ranked No. 23 in the nation in pass defense (186.4 ypg) last season.

The defensive line will have to be rebuilt, with defensive tackle Cornell Evans the lone returning starter. Will Clark had a nice spring at defensive end after contributing on special teams last season, and transfer edges Logan Goodwin and Sedrick Vessah were all-league at their previous stops.

The linebacking corps lost All-American Red Murdock and will try to piece it together with transfers and backups from last season. FCS Cornell transfer Joey Cheshire impressed coaches early, and Virginia transfer Stevie Bracey looks like he will play a big role. Redshirt freshman George Hill also will challenge for a rotational spot.

SPECIALISTS Placekicker Oliver Hautanen did not see any action as a true freshman last season, and Ethan Stumpf has yet to punt. The Bulls also brought in Andrew VanSlyke from James Madison to compete for the punter spot.

FINAL ANALYSIS Head coach Pete Lembo is starting over in a lot of ways, and a lot of the rebuild will depend on the quarterback. Wright will likely have some growing pains, but he has potential. The lines need to be better than a year ago, and it is not clear that the Bulls upgraded there. Reaching a second bowl in Lembo's first three years will be a challenge.

2025 RESULTS (5-7, 4-4 MAC)

Aug. 28	at Minnesota	L	10-23
Sept. 6	Saint Francis (Pa.)	W	45-6
Sept. 13	at Kent State	W	31-28
Sept. 20	Troy	L	17-21
Sept. 27	UConn	L	17-20
Oct. 4	Eastern Michigan (ot)	W	31-30
Oct. 18	at UMass	W	28-21
Oct. 25	Akron	L	16-24
Nov. 1	at Bowling Green	W	28-3
Nov. 12	at Central Michigan	L	19-38
Nov. 19	Miami (Ohio)	L	20-37
Nov. 28	Ohio	L	26-31

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 3	UAlbany
Sept. 12	at FIU
Sept. 19	at Penn State
Sept. 26	Robert Morris
Oct. 3	Western Michigan
Oct. 10	at Toledo
Oct. 17	UMass
Oct. 24	Bowling Green
Nov. 3	at Miami (Ohio)
Nov. 11	at Ball State
Nov. 18	Central Michigan
Nov. 27	at Akron

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Malachi Ervin, EDGE	★★★
2.	Aiden Anderson, EDGE	★★★
3.	Qur'an McNeill, QB	★★★
4.	Chase Enlow, RB	★★★
5.	Jack Garbolino, LB	★★★
6.	Preston Lunsford, EDGE	★★★
7.	William Reed, DL	★★★
8.	Royce Rogers, DL	★★★
9.	Na'Rod Jarvis, LB	★★★
10.	Marco Cate, IOL	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Pete Lembo • Record at School: 14-11 (2 years) • Career Record: 126-76 (17 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Tony Tokarz • Defensive Coordinator: Brian Dougherty • Location: Amherst, N.Y. • Stadium: Broadview Stadium (25,013)

CENTRAL MICHIGAN CHIPPEWAS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 98 | MAC PREDICTION: 3 | 2025 RECORD: 7-6, 5-3 MAC

OFFENSE Second-year head coach Matt Drinkall plans to use multiple quarterbacks again this season. Angel Flores will primarily be used as a running threat, and Jadyn Glasser is a traditional pocket passer. Flores missed four games due to injury last season, but he had a team-high 107 rushing attempts for 527 yards and eight TDs. He threw just 28 passes, completing 19. Glasser has played in six games over two years but will be featured plenty after a strong spring.

Vaughn Blue arrives from Liberty after three up-and-down years and will take over RB1 duties. Brock Townsend averaged just over six carries per game last season and will be a factor.

Senior Langston Lewis, a third-team All-MAC honoree, gives Glasser and Flores a reliable target as the only returning starting wideout. Sophomore Nasir Williams also had a strong spring.

The offensive line is deeper and more experienced. Left guard Jacob Russell started every game last year and is an all-league candidate.

DEFENSE Three starters return on a unit that ranked seventh in the MAC in total defense. Quavion Bird is back at defensive tackle after taking over the position halfway through the year. Korver Demma is another edge with starting experience, and the coaching staff is excited about sophomore JJ Douglas, who moved early in his true freshman season from tight end to defensive end and looks like he will break out in Year 2.

The linebacker room has to be completely rebuilt. Xavier White, whose father played in the NFL and great uncle Charles White won the Heisman Trophy in 1979, was in the rotation last season. Victor Earl, another projected starter, saw limited action off the bench last season.

In the secondary, corner Jaion Jackson will be a third-year starter and is the unquestioned leader of the back line. JaJuan Jones and Ty Williams will battle for the spot opposite Jackson. Safeties will be inexperienced, with Justin Taylor transferring in from Wyoming.

SPECIALISTS Declan Duley will be back at punter. He averaged 41.1 yards per punt in his first year after transferring from Illinois. Caden VanHuis, who played in the Under Armour All-America game as a senior in high school, will take over the placekicking duties.

FINAL ANALYSIS Can CMU make it to back-to-back bowls? The Chippewas miss two of the four other MAC teams that reached the postseason last year, but they also play national champion runner-up Miami (Fla.) and New Mexico (9-4 last season) on the road in non-league play. The defense has a lot of questions at all three levels, but the offense has potential if Glasser can translate his spring performance at QB into fall production.

BROCK TOWNSEND

SCOUTING THE CHIPPEWAS

"[Head coach] Matt Drinkall is doing a great job at that place. He's built a culture coming from Army. He's got a good group of young coaches, and guys who are getting their first shot at this level. He's doing good for what he has. ... Yes, that's a very hard school to recruit to. You're in the middle of the state of Michigan. There's literally nothing around that place. It's a place that if you can win, when you've got the iron hot, you've gotta get out because it's not gonna last long. You're gonna find a spark every once in a while, and I think that's what [Drinkall] will do there, and then he's gotta bounce from there."

— An opposing MAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)

WR	20	**LANGSTON LEWIS (SR.)**	9	Justin Ruffin Jr. (So.)
WR	17	Braylen Naves (Fr.)	16	Shawn Foster II* (Jr.)
WR	3	Nasir Williams (So.)	81	Tayte Vanderleest (Jr.)
LT	69	Jacob Booth (Jr.)	58	John Williams* (So.)
LG	70	**JACOB RUSSELL (JR.)**	60	John Iannuzzi (Sr.)
C	55	Losini Maka* (Sr.)	72	Trevor Swan* (Sr.)
RG	66	**MATTHEW NEHF (JR.)**	59	Brady Ploucha (Sr.)
RT	76	**MARTIN KOIVISTO (SR.)**	54	Triston Pierre (Fr.)
TE	41	Rusty VanWetzinga IV (Jr.)	85	Myles Peters (So.)
QB	7	Angel Flores (Sr.)	5	Jadyn Glasser (So.)
RB	24	Vaughn Blue* (Jr.)	2	Brock Townsend (So.)

DEFENSE (3)

DE	5	**KORVER DEMMA (JR.)**	48	Nathan VanTimmeren (Jr.)
DT	96	**QUAVION BIRD (SO.)**	95	Joey VanWetzinga (So.)
DT	92	Jaxon Cherry* (Jr.)	97	Max Van Fleet (Sr.)
DE	85	JJ Douglas (So.)	6	Hunter Zirkle* (Jr.)
LB	8	Victor Earl (So.)	33	Elijah Reynolds (Fr.)
LB	11	Xavier White (Jr.)	30	Antonio Cherry Jr.* (So.)
LB	34	Drew Esper (Fr.)	10	Jeremiah Alston (Jr.)
CB	20	JaJuan Jones (Fr.)	24	Ty Williams* (Sr.)
CB	4	**JAION JACKSON (JR.)**	12	Donavan Philord* (So.)
S	14	Justin Taylor* (Jr.)	27	Tysen Campbell (So.)
S	19	Darrell Bryant Jr.* (Sr.)	37	Colton Benaitis (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	38	Caden VanHuis (Fr.)	KR	9 Justin Ruffin Jr. (So.)
P	18	Declan Duley (Jr.)	PR	9 Justin Ruffin Jr. (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

2025 RESULTS (7-6, 5-3 MAC)

Aug. 29	at San José State	W	16-14
Sept. 6	at Pitt	L	17-45
Sept. 13	at Michigan	L	3-63
Sept. 20	Wagner	W	49-10
Sept. 27	Eastern Michigan	W	24-13
Oct. 4	at Akron	L	22-28
Oct. 18	at Bowling Green	W	27-6
Oct. 25	UMass	W	38-13
Nov. 1	at Western Michigan	L	21-24
Nov. 12	Buffalo	W	38-19
Nov. 19	at Kent State	W	28-16
Nov. 29	Toledo	L	3-21
Dec. 26	vs. Northwestern #	L	7-34

#GameAbove Sports Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	at New Mexico
Sept. 12	Colgate
Sept. 19	Wyoming
Sept. 26	at Miami (Fla.)
Oct. 3	Akron
Oct. 10	at Ohio
Oct. 17	Western Michigan
Oct. 24	Miami (Ohio)
Nov. 4	Eastern Michigan#
Nov. 11	Sacramento State
Nov. 18	at Buffalo
Nov. 28	at Ball State

#Detroit

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Trav Moore, RB	★★★
2.	Colton Benaitis, S	★★★
3.	Drew Esper, LB	★★★
4.	Elijah Reynolds, LB	★★★
5.	Lucas Hoffmeyer, TE	★★★
6.	Kobe Hendricks, RB	★★★
7.	Wyatt Graffin, IOL	★★★
8.	Matt Sexton, EDGE	★★★
9.	Zack Wagner, TE	★★★
10.	JaJuan Jones, S	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Matt Drinkall • Record at School: 7-6 (1 year)
Career Record: 49-23 (6 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Jim Chapin
Defensive Coordinator: Sean Cronin • Location: Mount Pleasant, Mich.
Stadium: Kelly/Shorts Stadium (35,127)

JOSEPH WEISER/ICON SPORTSWIRE VIA GETTY IMAGES

NOAH KIM

SCOUTING THE EAGLES

"I thought they were really, really well-coached when we faced them last year. Coming into it, I didn't think they were overly talented, but they had a really, really good game plan. Defensively, they didn't overcook it. Schematically, they were sound. Up front, that's what stood out to me the most. ... In the portal, they got a guy, [Oklahoma State offensive tackle transfer] Tyler Brumfield, that I think is going to be a really good player for them. ... Now, you go develop somebody, they're leaving you in six to nine months. That's the new reality, so I think the expectation to make a bowl game is unrealistic at a place like that moving forward. I think [head coach] Chris Creighton does a great job, and I don't just take the coach's side."

— An opposing MAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)				
WR	81	**NICK DEVEREAUX (SR.)**	23	Harold Mack (So.)
WR	17	Benson Prosper (Sr.)	18	Mekhi Fox (Jr.)
WR	11	Antonio Floyd (Jr.)	24	Joey Mattord (Sr.)
LT	68	Tyler McMillan* (Sr.)	60	Cole Powell (So.)
LG	66	**JOSHUA ANDERSON (SR.)**	74	Carter Miculka (Fr.)
C	65	**NICHOLAS GALLEGOS (SR.)**	72	Cole Dellinger* (Jr.)
RG	75	Elijha Payne* (Jr.)	78	Dennis Strey Jr. (Sr.)
RT	71	Tyler Brumfield* (Jr.)	55	Guzzy Kayed* (Jr.)
TE	87	**JOSHUA LONG (JR.)**	88	Tanner Lemaster (Sr.)
QB	1	**NOAH KIM (SR.)**	12	Jace Stuckey (Jr.)
RB	28	Braydon Bennett* (Sr.)	21	Malachi James* (Jr.)
DEFENSE (4)				
DE	33	**CARTER EVANS (SR.)**	90	Hector Gonzalez (So.)
NT	85	Jefferson Adam (Sr.)	99	Warren-Stevens Tayou (Sr.)
DT	52	Javon Thomas (Jr.)	64	Noah Patterson (Jr.)
EDGE	54	Quincy Byas (So.)	88	Ronn Hardin (Sr.)
LB	3	**BARRY MANNING (SR.)**	32	Ja'Quel Mack (Sr.)
LB	11	Zach Mowchan (Sr.)	40	Bryce Eliuk (Sr.)
CB	16	Caleb Coley (Sr.)	18	Dior Boyd (Sr.)
CB	17	Caleb Dobbs (Jr.)	22	Fa'Rel Carter (Fr.)
S	6	**BRYCE LLEWELLYN (SR.)**	34	Ray Hester (Jr.)
SS	8	Jaivian Norman (Sr.)	29	Donmiel Rogers (So.)
FS	13	Jason Marshall (Sr.)	4	**JUAN SALAS (SR.)**
SPECIALISTS				
K	46	Rudy Kessinger (So.)	KR	17	Benson Prosper (Sr.)
P	39	Daniel Hull (Jr.)	PR	4	Juan Salas (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

JORDAN PRATHER-IMAGN IMAGES

EASTERN MICHIGAN EAGLES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 124 | MAC PREDICTION: 8 | 2025 RECORD: 4-8, 3-5 MAC

OFFENSE Quarterback Noah Kim is back for his fifth year and second as the starter for Eastern Michigan. He connected on 61% of his passes and threw for 2,817 yards a year ago with 18 touchdowns and 11 interceptions. He will enter 2026 as one of the MAC's more experienced passers; this season marks the first time since 2017 that EMU is returning its starter at quarterback.

Three of Kim's top four pass-catchers return as well, with second-team All-MAC tight end Joshua Long (37 catches, 357 yards, three TDs) likely to be a featured target in his junior season. Nick Devereaux was third-team All-MAC after his 510-yard, seven-touchdown season, and Harold Mack had a 179-yard game against Miami (Ohio) last year.

The primary running back will be graduate transfer Braydon Bennett from Virginia Tech, who saw little action with the Hokies but rushed for almost 2,000 yards in four years at Coastal Carolina.

Center Nicholas Gallegos leads an offensive line that has two starters back.

DEFENSE The backline of the Eagles' defense will be deep and experienced. Bryce Llewellyn was second-team All-MAC at safety and the team's defensive MVP after recording 102 tackles. Barry Manning is capable of playing safety after being forced to start at linebacker for much of last season due to injuries. Manning tied for the team lead in tackles for a loss and was second in total tackles. Former Michigan State transfer Caleb Coley will be a full-time starter at corner.

Senior Zach Mowchan, who has battled injuries the last two seasons, will try to fortify the linebacking corps.

Veteran end Carter Evans leads the defensive line, and Jefferson Adam projects to start after missing all of 2025 with a preseason injury. The Eagles will need to improve upon a rushing defense that allowed a league-high 232.1 yards per game.

SPECIALISTS Placekicker Rudy Kessinger returns after a season that saw him connect on 17-of-23 field goals. He was 8-of-14 from beyond 40 yards. Daniel Hull, who signed with Missouri out of high school, may take over the punting duties in his third year with the Eagles.

FINAL ANALYSIS Having Kim and his top receivers back is a big plus for EMU. Head coach Chris Creighton likes to maintain offensive balance, but the Eagles' passing game should be a step ahead early in the season. Defensively, EMU needs more from its front seven if it wants to contend for a bowl. EMU must find three wins beyond MAC newcomer Sacramento State, UMass and FCS Lindenwood to make the postseason.

2025 RESULTS (4-8, 3-5 MAC)

Aug. 30	at Texas State	L	27-52
Sept. 6	Long Island	L	23-28
Sept. 13	at Kentucky	L	23-48
Sept. 20	Louisiana	W	34-31
Sept. 27	at Central Michigan	L	13-24
Oct. 4	at Buffalo (ot)	L	30-31
Oct. 11	Northern Illinois	W	16-10
Oct. 18	at Miami (Ohio)	L	30-44
Oct. 25	Ohio	L	21-28
Nov. 8	Bowling Green	W	27-21
Nov. 15	at Ball State	W	24-9
Nov. 25	Western Michigan	L	21-31

2026 SCHEDULE

Aug. 29	Sacramento State
Sept. 4	San José State
Sept. 12	at Michigan State
Sept. 19	at Wisconsin
Sept. 26	Lindenwood
Oct. 3	at UMass
Oct. 10	at Akron
Oct. 17	Toledo
Oct. 24	at Ohio
Nov. 4	Central Michigan#
Nov. 17	at W. Michigan
Nov. 24	Kent State

#Detroit

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Nazir Jones-Davis, RB	★★★
2.	RJ Alphonse, EDGE	★★★
3.	Nily Taylor, OT	★★★
4.	Fa'rel Carter, CB	★★★
5.	Nathan Piggott, TE	★★★
6.	Samuel Adjin, IOL	★★★
7.	Decorie Johnson, RB	★★★
8.	Kijon Braxton, EDGE	★★★
9.	Aaron Kearse, S	★★★
10.	Elgin McDuffey, LB	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Chris Creighton • Record at School: 61-83 (12 years) • Career Record: 200-129 (29 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Mike Piatkowski • Defensive Coordinators: Tate Omli, Kasey Teegardin • Location: Ypsilanti, Mich. • Stadium: Rynearson Stadium (26,188)

KENT STATE GOLDEN FLASHES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 126 | MAC PREDICTION: 10 | 2025 RECORD: 5-7, 4-4 MAC

OFFENSE The Golden Flashes were fortunate to hold on to quarterback Dru DeShields after he turned in a strong 2025 season. DeShields threw 18 touchdowns with only three interceptions and completed 57% of his passes in his first season. He is the top player on a unit that must improve on last season's 21.3 points per game, and DeShields gives it a chance to do that.

Tight end Terik Mulder will figure heavily in the passing attack and is an All-MAC candidate after catching 19 passes for 198 yards and four touchdowns last season. Kick return specialist Da'Realyst Clark is expected to carry more of a load at wide receiver, and slot man Wayne Harris took a big step forward in spring practice.

Spring ball did not produce a No. 1 tailback, as Cincinnati transfer Jakorion Caffey, FCS Illinois State transfer Mason King, Brandon White and Donovan Delaney Jr. will all compete in the fall. This position has the most uncertainty heading into the season.

The offensive line has holes to fill, but some incoming transfers make this unit deeper than last season.

DEFENSE Defensive tackle Thomas Aden is back after starting for the first time since transferring from Pitt. Jaihien Roy and Antonio Bottiggi, two players who are both in their third year in the program and have worked their way to the top of the depth chart, will man the edges.

Rocco Nicholl returns to Kent State at linebacker, where he started in 2024 before spending a year at USF. He will be one of the leaders on a unit that finished 125th in FBS in total defense last season.

Both starting safeties — Derrick Jackson III and Joel Cordoba — are back, and nickel DJ Barnes played 70% of the team's snaps. The corners will be new, and there could be a learning curve there.

SPECIALISTS Clark took two kickoffs back for touchdowns last season and was first-team All-MAC as a return specialist. Harris also had a touchdown on a punt return and averaged a MAC-best 13.2 yards per punt return. Australian Jake Stoeckel lost his punting job last season but has regained the top spot heading into camp. There is a three-way battle for kicker.

FINAL ANALYSIS Kent State's five-win season in 2025 might not seem like much, but consider that the Flashes went 1-23 the previous two seasons and saw their head coach placed on leave last March and fired on April 11. Mark Carney sorted through the chaos, found a quarterback and went 4-4 in MAC play after starting from scratch in his first season as head coach. He needs to replace some starters lost to the portal, but because he was able to hang on to his QB, expectations have risen, although a bowl might be just out of reach this year.

2025 RESULTS (5-7, 4-4 MAC)

Aug. 30	Merrimack	W	21-17
Sept. 6	at Texas Tech	L	14-62
Sept. 13	Buffalo	L	28-31
Sept. 20	at Florida State	L	10-66
Oct. 4	at Oklahoma	L	0-44
Oct. 11	UMass	W	42-6
Oct. 18	at Toledo	L	10-45
Oct. 25	Bowling Green	W	24-21
Nov. 5	at Ball State	L	13-17
Nov. 11	at Akron (ot)	W	42-35
Nov. 19	Central Michigan	L	16-28
Nov. 28	at Northern Illinois	W	35-31

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	at South Carolina
Sept. 12	Wofford
Sept. 19	at Ohio State
Sept. 26	Ball State
Oct. 3	Ohio
Oct. 10	at W. Michigan
Oct. 17	at South Florida
Oct. 24	Akron
Oct. 30	at Sacramento St.
Nov. 10	at Bowling Green
Nov. 17	Miami (Ohio)
Nov. 24	at Eastern Michigan

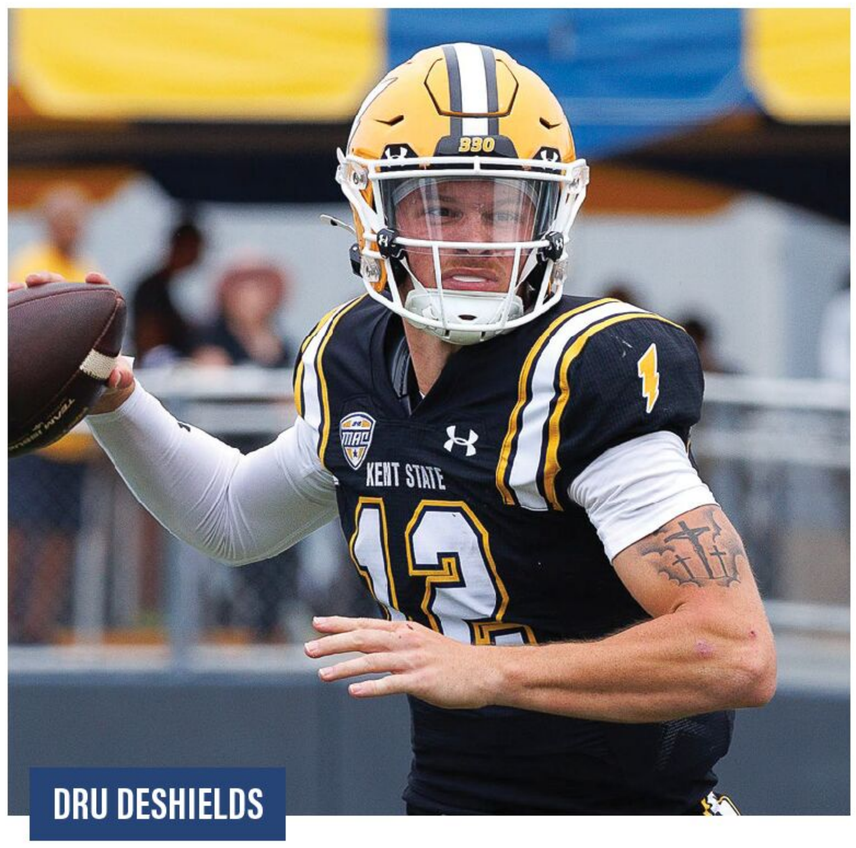
TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Hunter Sprangers, OT	★★★
2.	Daiveon Taylor, LB	★★★
3.	Jackson Farley, RB	★★★
4.	Lennox Lemon, CB	★★★
5.	Brendyn Smith, WR	★★★
6.	Zymir Reed, WR	★★★
7.	William Johnson III, IOL	★★★
8.	Kendall McNutt, LB	★★★
9.	Colin Prichard, OT	★★★
10.	Eckley Bridges, EDGE	★★★

*Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Mark Carney • Record at School: 5-7 (1 year) • Career Record: 5-7 (1 year) • Offensive Coordinator: Clay Patterson
Defensive Coordinator: Cherokee Valeria • Location: Kent, Ohio • Stadium: Dix Stadium (25,319)



DRU DESHIELDS

SCOUTING THE GOLDEN FLASHES

"When you watched them compared to the previous two years, those guys played hard for [head coach] Mark Carney. That's not some coach slogan bulls—. You could see the belief. He's got that program in the right direction. That's one of the best turnarounds I've ever seen at the FBS level to do that in a year. ... [Quarterback] Dru DeShields doesn't turn the football over, ever. And he's just got this backyard football stuff about him. His teammates played hard for him. There's not one thing that flashes with him. He just does everything really well. ... There was some talent on the roster, but they went from not playing hard for their head coach to playing hard for their head coach, and it was so obvious on film."

— An opposing MAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR	30	Da'Realyst Clark (Sr.)	86	Jared Kelley (Jr.)
WR	**33**	**AYDEN HARRIS (SO.)**	3	Jay Jay Etheridge (Jr.)
WR	13	Ardell Banks (Jr.)	6	Wayne Harris (So.)
LT	**78**	**TYLER MEADOWS (SO.)**	70	Hudson Chasko (Sr.)
LG	**54**	**DUSTYN MORELL (SR.)**	75	Boston Crowell (Fr.
C	50	Ben Midea* (Jr.)	77	Rico Steele (So.)
RG	72	Cecil Wilson (Jr.)	**55**	**JAXON DUNN (SO.)**
RT	76	Mofe Adewole* (Sr.)	73	William Johnson III (Fr.)
TE	89	Terik Mulder (Sr.)	**18**	**HUNTER HOPPERTON (SR.)**
QB	**12**	**DRU DESHIELDS (JR.)**	2	Nolan Good (Fr.)
RB	5	Jakorion Caffey* (So.)	21	Mason King* (Sr.)

DEFENSE (3)

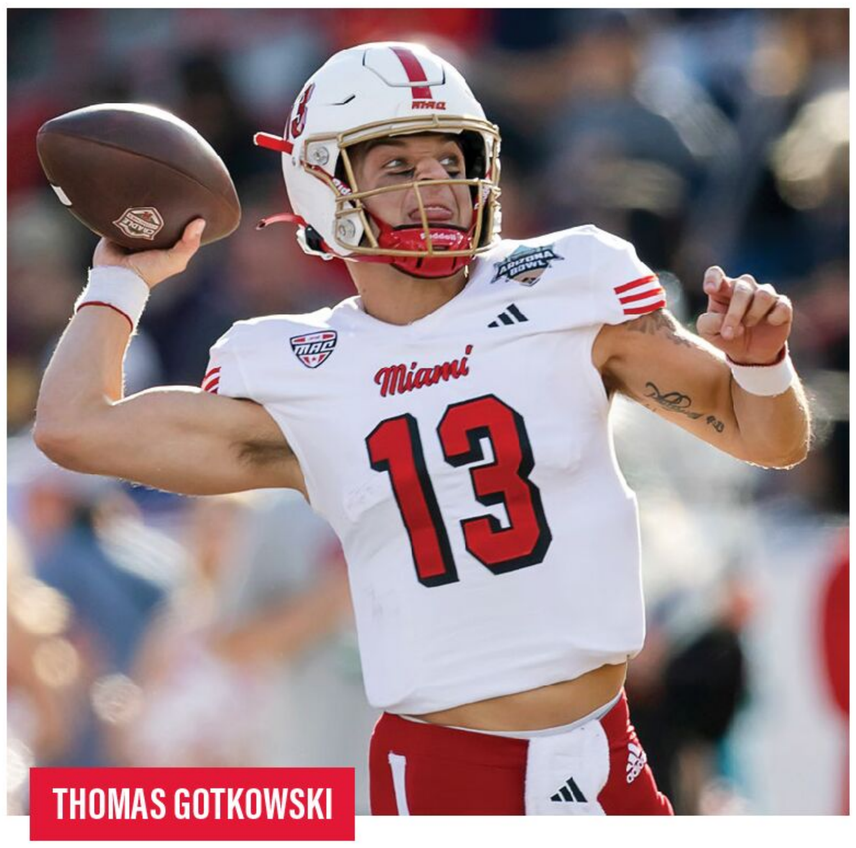
DE	33	Jaihien Roy (So.)	17	Semaj Bridgeman* (Jr.)
DT	**5**	**THOMAS ADEN (SR.)**	58	Darian Blachewicz (So.)
DT	**55**	**JOSUE CORDOBA (SO.)**	52	Aiden Burgess (So.)
DE	44	Antonio Bottiggi (So.)	88	Mohammed Hazime (Sr.)
LB	4	Rocco Nicholl* (Sr.)	15	Sayed Abuhamdeh (Jr.)
LB	10	Hayden Dawahare* (Jr.)	24	Tanner Mintz (Fr.)
LB	32	Trey Rubinstein (So.)	34	Rafael Terrero Jr. (Fr.)
CB	1	A'tiq Muhammad (Sr.)	27	Lennox Lemon (Fr.)
CB	22	Davion Pritchard* (So.)	7	Angelo Stockstill (Jr.)
S	21	Joel Cordoba (So.)	18	Norey Johnson* (Sr.)
S	**31**	**DERRICK JACKSON III (SO.)**	19	DJ Barnes (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	96	Sean Leonard (Fr.)	KR	30	Da'Realyst Clark (Sr.)
P	97	Jake Stoeckel (Fr.)	PR	6	Wayne Harris (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

NICHOLAS MCLAUGHLIN



THOMAS GOTKOWSKI

MARK J. REBILAS-IMAGN IMAGES

SCOUTING THE REDHAWKS

"They don't get fazed by anything — tough, gritty. They don't turn the football over. They don't do anything crazy on offense. They're gonna run the football, but what they do really well is make that one of the best special teams coordinator jobs in the country. They replace those coordinators and just keep that thing going. They're always one of the top-25 most efficient special teams units in the country. ... Their fundamentals show up on film. They coach those players hard, and they get the right kids that fit into what they do. I don't think the NIL stuff is gonna change their approach. They're pretty simple schematically on defense, but it doesn't matter because they have all the answers to it. They just don't do anything stupid."

— An opposing MAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)				
WR	17	Braylon Isom (So.)	4	Devin Hyatt* (Jr.)
WR	0	**KEITH REYNOLDS (JR.)**	3	Quintin Simmons* (Fr.)
WR	12	Carl Jenkins* (So.)	1	Maleek Huggins* (Sr.)
WR	2	Brady Simmons (Sr.)	8	Damarion Witten* (Jr.)
LT	51	**ERIC SMITH (SR.)**	71	Lucas Barnes (Fr.)
LG	61	Andrew Lowry (Jr.)	78	Devontae Armstrong* (So.)
C	72	**KRIS MANU (SO.)**	76	Brian Beidatsch* (Sr.)
RG	74	**GREG SMITH JR. (JR.)**	73	Brandon Lawhorn Moore (Sr.)
RT	54	Evan Malcore* (Sr.)	77	Shaun Shahu* (Sr.)
QB	13	Thomas Gotkowski (So.)	16	David McComb* (Fr.)
RB	5	Rodney Nelson* (Jr.)	20	Cade Yacamelli (Sr.)
DEFENSE (3)				
DE	22	Bai Jobe (Jr.)	5	Devin Bell (So.)
DT	99	OJ Alexander (So.)	14	Mikah Coleman* (Sr.)
DT	92	**ROOSEVELT ANDREWS III (JR.)**	47	Brach Rice (So.)
DE	43	Grant Lyons (Sr.)	32	James Schott (Jr.)
LB	15	Blaine Myrick (Sr.)	3	**MALCOLM McCAIN (JR.)**
LB	8	CJ Young* (Jr.)	11	Brock Uihlein (Jr.)
CB	12	**KALEB MARTIN (JR.)**	0	Amariyun Knighten* (Sr.)
CB	6	Adrian Walker Jr. (So.)	21	Toney Coleman Jr. (Jr.)
NB	26	Eli Coppess (Sr.)	15	Blayne Myrick* (Sr.)
S	24	Mychal Yharbrough (Sr.)	2	Jackson Pons (So.)
S	28	Leo Colombi (So.)	29	Easton Jointer (Fr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	38	Kellan McLaughlin (Jr.)	KR	0 Keith Reynolds (Jr.)
P	34	Pierse Stainton (Sr.)	PR	10 Jermaine Agee (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

MIAMI (OHIO) REDHAWKS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 86 | MAC PREDICTION: 1 | 2025 RECORD: 7-7, 6-2 MAC

OFFENSE Sophomore Thomas Gotkowski is expected to be QB1 in the fall after taking the reins late last season. He sparked a stagnant offense in his first two games with four TD passes, but both he and the offense regressed significantly in losses to Western Michigan in the MAC Championship Game and to Fresno State in the Arizona Bowl. Former Kansas backup David McComb is the secondary option.

Rodney Nelson is expected to get the bulk of the carries at running back for the RedHawks. He is transferring in from FCS Monmouth, where he was the CAA Player of the Year after rushing for 1,802 yards and 18 touchdowns. Wisconsin transfer Cade Yacamelli will be there in a supporting role, and it will be interesting to see if there is a timeshare, which the RedHawks typically employ.

Miami mostly uses four wideouts, and almost all the receivers will be newcomers. Transfers Quintin Simmons (Kentucky), Devin Hyatt (Arizona) and Damarion Witten (Ohio State) bring Power 4 credibility.

Left tackle Eric Smith was third-team All-MAC a year ago, and fellow third-team honoree Evan Malcore, a Northern Illinois transfer, joins him.

DEFENSE The strongest unit on a defense that has been top five in the MAC four years running will be the linebackers. CJ Young, a second-team All-MAC performer at Kent State, is transferring in, and fellow newcomer Blayne Myrick was a first-team All-Sun Belt honoree at South Alabama. Both should contend for all-conference honors. Malcolm McCain is the team's leading returning tackler, and Brock Uihlein is also a steady performer.

On the defensive line, rotational players will step in alongside returning starter Roosevelt Andrews III, and Bai Jobe, Devin Bell and Grant Lyons are among the edge rushers.

Miami lost its starting safeties, both of whom were among the best in the conference, although Mychal Yharbrough impressed in the spring.

SPECIALISTS Junior Kellan McLaughlin has been the kickoff specialist for three years, but with the departure of all-league placekicker Dom Dzioban, McLaughlin will add field goals and extra points to his duties. Punter Pierse Stainton averaged 42.3 yards per kick last season.

FINAL ANALYSIS Miami has been to three straight MAC title games, and there is a good chance for a fourth if the higher-end transfers turn out to be as good as advertised. The offense should be improved as Gotkowski gains more experience and Nelson emerges at running back, and head coach Chuck Martin consistently fields a strong defense.

2025 RESULTS (7-7, 6-2 MAC)

Aug. 28	at Wisconsin	L	0-17
Sept. 6	at Rutgers	L	17-45
Sept. 20	UNLV	L	38-41
Sept. 27	Lindenwood	W	38-0
Oct. 4	at Northern Illinois	W	25-14
Oct. 11	at Akron	W	20-7
Oct. 18	Eastern Michigan	W	44-30
Oct. 25	Western Michigan	W	26-17
Nov. 4	at Ohio	L	20-24
Nov. 12	Toledo	L	3-24
Nov. 19	at Buffalo	W	37-20
Nov. 29	Ball State	W	45-24
Dec. 6	vs. W. Michigan #	L	13-23
Dec. 27	vs. Fresno State %	L	3-18

#Detroit %Arizona Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	at Pitt
Sept. 12	Holy Cross
Sept. 19	at Cincinnati #
Sept. 26	UConn
Oct. 3	Bowling Green
Oct. 10	at UMass
Oct. 17	Akron
Oct. 24	at Central Michigan
Nov. 3	Buffalo
Nov. 10	Ohio
Nov. 17	at Kent State
Nov. 24	at W. Michigan

#TQL Stadium

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Dominik Kosznicki, OT	★★★★
2.	Andrew Bellisari, QB	★★★
3.	Tommy Thies, S	★★★
4.	William Pressley, WR	★★★
5.	Ike Steward, RB	★★★
6.	Brody Sink, LB	★★★
7.	Zach Hultgren, WR	★★★
8.	Justen Hodge, WR	★★★
9.	L. Shackleford-Vickroy, EDGE	★★★
10.	Tristan Reed, WR	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Chuck Martin • Record at School: 72-74 (12 years)
Career Record: 146-81 (18 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Gus Ragland
Defensive Coordinator: Bill Brechin • Location: Oxford, Ohio
Stadium: Yager Stadium (24,286)

OHIO BOBCATS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 111 | MAC PREDICTION: 5 | 2025 RECORD: 9-4, 6-2 MAC

OFFENSE Offensive coordinator Scott Isphording is back, and that's about it. The Bobcats lost nearly all of their offensive production to graduation or the transfer portal. The biggest storyline is under center, where a mix of inexperienced returners and highly productive FCS New Hampshire transfer Matt Vezza will compete for the starting job.

The ground game says goodbye to 1,300-yard rusher Sieh Bangura, but returnee Duncan Brune (585 yards, eight TDs) and UConn transfer Victor Rosa (302 total yards, three TDs) provide adequate reinforcements. At receiver, Ohio benefits from experienced targets like Dom Dorwart, Max Rodarte and Eian Pugh, who combined for 24 receptions and 280 yards. Whoever wins the QB battle will have reliable options on key downs.

The offensive line is almost entirely rebuilt through the transfer portal. It's one of the most uncertain position groups entering 2026, with all five starters having departed. Ohio's staff targeted size and experience through the portal. The goal is to maintain the physical identity that has defined the program's rushing attack in recent years.

DEFENSE Ohio's defense will dictate its win-loss record. Linebackers Jack Fries and Michael Molnar return to anchor the unit, along with defensive linemen Austin Mitchell, Nehemiah Dukes and Derek Reagans. The secondary has a blend of returnees and transfers that hopes to lock down opposing quarterbacks and wide receivers.

Defensive coordinator Kurt Mattix was on the 2024 Ohio staff. Now, he's back to implement an aggressive, attacking style that prioritizes disruption at the line of scrimmage and increased pressure. The philosophical shift could pay dividends if the front seven adapts quickly.

While the talent level appears solid, execution in a new system often takes time. If the defense can quickly adjust and create negative plays, it has the potential to become one of the more impactful units in the MAC.

SPECIALISTS Magnus Haines was one of the top punters in the MAC last season, averaging 42.3 yards per punt. Placekicker Will Hryszko transferred from Kent State, where he made all 31 extra points and went 8-of-11 on field goals. Brune and Rodarte give the Bobcats big-play ability in the return game.

FINAL ANALYSIS For the third consecutive season, Ohio is dealing with a coaching change. That's difficult enough, but in the transfer portal era, it's only exacerbated. The Bobcats are facing this season with a mostly brand-new roster. Head coach John Hauser is at least a familiar face, as he spent the previous three seasons on the staff. But can he sustain the momentum that Ohio has built with 40 wins over the past four years?

2025 RESULTS (9-4, 6-2 MAC)

Aug. 28	at Rutgers	L	31-34
Sept. 6	West Virginia	W	17-10
Sept. 13	at Ohio State	L	9-37
Sept. 20	Gardner-Webb	W	52-35
Sept. 27	Bowling Green	W	35-20
Oct. 4	at Ball State	L	14-20
Oct. 18	Northern Illinois	W	48-21
Oct. 25	at Eastern Michigan	W	28-21
Nov. 4	Miami (Ohio)	W	24-20
Nov. 11	at Western Michigan	L	13-17
Nov. 18	UMass	W	42-14
Nov. 28	at Buffalo	W	31-26
Dec. 23	vs. UNLV #	W	17-10

#Frisco Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	at Nebraska
Sept. 12	Jacksonville State
Sept. 19	at South Alabama
Sept. 26	Stonehill
Oct. 3	at Kent State
Oct. 10	Central Michigan
Oct. 17	at Sacramento St.
Oct. 24	Eastern Michigan
Nov. 3	at Akron
Nov. 10	at Miami (Ohio)
Nov. 17	Ball State
Nov. 27	Toledo

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Brandon Jenkins, ATH	★★★
2.	Danny Fortson Jr., IOL	★★★
3.	Kindall Brown, CB	★★★
4.	Kaden Page, WR	★★★
5.	Marcus Hughbanks, WR	★★★
6.	Colton Crosley, IOL	★★★
7.	Levi Davis, QB	★★★
8.	Job Mavrick, IOL	★★★
9.	Austin Adkins, DL	★★★
10.	Mike Montgomery, OT	★★★

*Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: John Hauser • Record at School: 1-0 (1 year)
Career Record: 1-0 (1 year) • Offensive Coordinator: Scott Isphording
Defensive Coordinator: Kurt Mattix • Location: Athens, Ohio
Stadium: Peden Stadium (24,000)

JACK FRIES

SCOUTING THE BOBCATS

"The [former head coach Brian Smith resignation] was shocking. I thought he did a great job picking up where Tim Albin left off. Now, keeping it in-house with John Hauser, I don't expect a drop-off because they do a really good job of recruiting and evaluation. They do a great job of recruiting high school kids and developing them. I see more of a plug-and-play situation with them with somebody who has probably been sitting on the bench the last couple of years developing and can now get on the field. ... [Departed quarterback] Parker Navarro was really, really good for this conference. That's gonna be the hardest one to replace, but everywhere else, I see plug-and-play with the guys that they've recruited from high school."

— An opposing MAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (1)

WR	0	Delaney Crawford (Sr.)	2	Preston Bowman* (Fr.)
WR	3	Max Rodarte (Sr.)	10	Ian Ver Steeg* (Sr.)
WR	**19**	**DOM DORWART (SO.)**	12	Eian Pugh (Sr.)
LT	75	Jarian Shelby (Sr.)	77	Sandro Malicevic* (Sr.)
LG	65	Josh Waite (Sr.)	72	Trumain Lawson* (Fr.)
C	71	Cassius Hulbert* (Sr.)	76	Bryce Parson (So.)
RG	55	CJ Dawson II* (Sr.)	63	Seth Anstead (So.)
RT	74	Tigana Cisse (Sr.)	70	Joshua Johnson (Sr.)
TE	84	AJ Miller (So.)	86	Andrew Metzger* (So.)
QB	9	Matt Vezza* (Jr.)	8	Nick Poulos (Sr.)
RB	6	Duncan Brune (Jr.)	23	Victor Rosa* (Sr.)

DEFENSE (5)

DE	9	Tyler Gillison* (Sr.)	23	Joseph Marsh (Jr.)
DT	**0**	**NEHEMIAH DUKES (SR.)**	57	Nathan Hale (Sr.)
DT	97	Austin Mitchell (Jr.)	98	Derek Reagans (Sr.)
OLB	**27**	**JACK FRIES (SR.)**	34	Lukas Stiles (Jr.)
ILB	**25**	**MICHAEL MOLNAR (SR.)**	12	Jermaine Minnis (Fr.)
ILB	**30**	**CHARLIE CHRISTOPHER (SO.)**	56	Cody Raymond* (So.)
HUSKY	4	Darren James-Hamilton* (So.)	49	Xavier Williams (So.)
CB	8	Barry Dillon* (So.)	20	Kendall Bannister (Jr.)
CB	21	Ronald Jackson Jr. (Sr.)	6	Tony Mathis (Jr.)
S	**2**	**DJ WALKER (JR.)**	13	DJ Morton (So.)
S	7	Eli Thompson* (Jr.)	3	JT Haskins (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	47	Will Hryszko* (Sr.)	KR	6	Duncan Brune (Jr.)
P	42	Magnus Haines (Sr.)	PR	3	Max Rodarte (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

BEN QUEEN-IMAGN IMAGES

DEREK HOUSTON

SCOUTING THE HORNETS

"I think it's gonna be better that [former head coach] Brennan Marion isn't there anymore. He was able to bring in recruits where they were maybe on their second or third school after starting at an SEC school when they shouldn't have been there in the first place. ... Hopefully with them jumping up to the MAC, it may help them with the high school recruiting. In California, there aren't a lot of small schools out there. Those kids always have to leave to go to other schools. Maybe they can attract those types of kids. But it'll be a challenge for them at first because there's a difference between the Midwest and the West Coast, and traveling to the Midwest to play a November Tuesday game is gonna be different. It's gonna be hard."

— An opposing MAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (1)

WR	2	Matt Coleman* (Sr.)	4	Kenyon Shabazz* (Jr.)
WR	12	Onterrio Smith Jr. (Jr.)	7	Khai Taylor* (Jr.)
WR	10	Jace Wilson (Sr.)	83	Jaxon Fresques (So.)
LT	71	Bryson Summers (Sr.)	55	Garrison Blank* (Fr.)
LG	64	Brandon Sousa (Jr.)	63	Graysen Lee (Fr.)
C	66	Hayden Frazier* (Jr.)	57	Luke Slater (So.)
RG	74	Vae Soifua* (Sr.)	75	DeAnthony Sheffield (Jr.)
RT	77	Jeremiah Stallworth (So.)	68	Davis May (Jr.)
TE	**16**	**JORDAN WILLIAMS (SR.)**	88	Cedric Anton* (Jr.)
QB	17	Carson Conklin* (Jr.)	8	Jackson Sharman* (Jr.)
RB	1	Jamar Curtis (Sr.)	14	Curron Borders (So.)

DEFENSE (2)

DE	**45**	**XAVIER WILLIAMS (SR.)**	99	Devyn Blake (Fr.)
DT	58	Jamel Howard* (Jr.)	9	Malik Tullis (Sr.)
DT	90	Austin Chambers* (So.)	97	Nick Dimitris* (Sr.)
LB	18	Fata Puloka (Jr.)	44	Diego Davis (Sr.)
LB	10	Derek Houston (Jr.)	**33**	**ALEX ROCHA (SR.)**
LB	8	Darson Jeanty* (Sr.)	26	Tim Thomas* (Sr.)
CB	22	Elias Mullican (Sr.)	2	Dionte Thornton* (Sr.)
CB	12	Malikai Nichols* (So.)	29	Caleb Reese (Fr.)
S	1	Boogsie Silvera* (Sr.)	38	Diesel Gordon (Jr.)
S	3	Amari Wallace* (Fr.)	6	Warren Smith Jr. (Jr.)
S	25	Naytel Mitchell (Fr.)	7	Noah King* (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	49	Grant Meadors (Jr.)	KR	1 Jamar Curtis (Sr.)
P	35	Jay Brockhaus* (Jr.)	PR	83 Jaxon Fresques (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

SACRAMENTO STATE HORNETS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 136 | MAC PREDICTION: 12 | 2025 RECORD: 7-5, 5-3 FCS BIG SKY

OFFENSE The Hornets welcome back quarterback Carson Conklin after one year at Fresno State. Conklin spent the first two seasons of his college career with Sacramento State, earning Freshman All-America honors at the FCS level and finishing third in voting for the Jerry Rice Award, given to the FCS' top freshman. He was a full-time starter in 2024 but led the Hornets to only three wins. He did complete 62% of his passes with 28 touchdowns and 12 interceptions before leaving for Fresno State. With the Bulldogs, Conklin moved into a starting role late in the year.

Conklin has some weapons in running backs Jamar Curtis and Curron Borders. Curtis was an FCS All-American at Lafayette who transferred to Sac State for 2025. He was injured most of last season, but he had more than 3,500 total yards and 35 touchdowns over three years at Lafayette.

New head coach Alonzo Carter will be starting over at wide receiver as the position hit the transfer portal almost as a unit. Matt Coleman has significant experience coming over from San José State, and Onterrio Smith Jr. has seen action in 20 games with the Hornets over two years.

The offensive line will also have to be rebuilt around Bryson Summers, who saw extensive action last year, and Jeremiah Stallworth.

DEFENSE The best unit for the Hornets clearly will be their linebackers. Derek Houston and Alex Rocha are both back after a frustrating 2025 that saw only one quarter where both were healthy at the same time. Houston and Rocha awere 100% in spring ball and will be critical in the middle of a unit that will be adapting to a new 3-3-5 scheme under defensive coordinator Adam Clark.

The defensive line was shifting players during the spring to see who would be in the rotation. Wisconsin transfer defensive tackle Jamel Howard won a starting job in the spring.

The secondary will also be a complete overhaul, with Boogsie Silvera arriving at safety after stops at FCS schools Charleston Southern and McNeese and another at USF.

SPECIALISTS Grant Meadors returns as the Hornets' kicker. The former Oregon Duck hit 12 of his 15 field goals in his first year in Sacramento with a long of 42. The punter situation won't be finalized until the fall.

FINAL ANALYSIS Sacramento State will likely struggle in its first year in the Mid-American Conference with a first-time head coach and a roster that was built on the idea it would be competing as an FCS Independent. Only after the transfer portal closed did Sacramento State receive an invitation to the MAC. There are questions along both lines, which is never good when a team is stepping up a level.

2025 RESULTS (7-5, 5-3 FCS BIG SKY)

Aug. 30	at South Dakota State	L	3-20
Sept. 6	at Nevada	L	17-20
Sept. 13	Mercyhurst	W	49-28
Sept. 20	Central Arkansas	W	45-16
Sept. 27	Cal Poly	L	24-32
Oct. 11	at Weber State	W	55-27
Oct. 18	Northern Colorado	W	40-35
Oct. 24	Montana	L	35-49
Nov. 1	at E. Washington	W	35-13
Nov. 8	at Portland State	W	52-24
Nov. 15	Idaho	W	23-20
Nov. 22	at UC Davis	L	27-31

2026 SCHEDULE

Aug. 29	at Eastern Michigan
Sept. 5	Miss. Valley St.
Sept. 12	at Fresno State
Sept. 19	North Dakota State
Sept. 26	UMass
Oct. 10	at Bowling Green
Oct. 17	Ohio
Oct. 24	at Ball State
Oct. 30	Kent State
Nov. 4	Toledo
Nov. 11	at Central Michigan
Nov. 28	at Hawai'i

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Devyn Blake, DL	★★★
2.	Leki Holani, LB	★★★
3.	Joshua Holani, S	★★★
4.	Daniel Swinney, RB	★★★
5.	Khai Taylor, WR	★★★
6.	Dezmyn Hardy, WR	★★★
7.	Peyton McCutcheon, LB	★★★
8.	Jiah Walls, LB	★★★
9.	Liam Meeker, QB	★★★
10.	Carlton Perrilliat, WR	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Alonzo Carter • Record at School: First Season • Career Record: First Season • Offensive Coordinators: Eric Kiesau, Eric Scott • Defensive Coordinators: Adam Clark, Kenwick Thompson • Location: Sacramento, Calif. • Stadium: Hornet Stadium (21,195)

SACRAMENTO STATE SID

TOLEDO ROCKETS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 99 | MAC PREDICTION: 4 | 2025 RECORD: 8-5, 6-2 MAC

OFFENSE Amid all the turnover that followed head coach Jason Candle's departure to UConn, the quarterback position is something of a known commodity. Junior John Alan Richter returns after serving as a backup the past two seasons and has shown flashes in limited opportunities. He had three starts as a redshirt freshman in 2024 and some backup duty in 2025, and he has completed 66% of his passes with seven TDs and one INT.

Running back CJ Miller is one of 14 FCS Mercer transfers who followed new head coach Mike Jacobs to Toledo, and he should be the top running back. Miller had 1,267 yards from scrimmage and scored 17 touchdowns for the Bears. Connor Walendzak led the Rockets in rushing two years ago and should also be a factor.

The offensive line welcomes back four players with starting experience, led by All-MAC candidate Stephen Gales at left tackle.

The wide receiver room is full of transfers, with Kalvin Gilbert Jr. (FCS Southeast Missouri State), Anthony Simpson (Michigan) and Adjatay Dabbs (Mercer) making early impressions. Bryson Hammer should also be a factor after being primarily a punt returner thus far in his career.

DEFENSE The most important player arriving from Mercer with Jacobs is defensive end Andrew Zock, the FCS Defensive Player of the Year in 2025. Zock, who had 20 tackles for a loss and 11.5 sacks, decided to stay with Jacobs despite Power 4 offers and will be the leader on the defense.

How the transfers adjust will be the story. Linebacker Kari Jackson spent two seasons at Penn State and was making an early impression in the spring. Linebackers Julian Fox and Isaac Prince earned All-Southern Conference honors at Mercer. Safety Armorion Smith is spending his final season at Toledo after seeing seven starts at Michigan State. Corner Cam Jones was an All-Patriot League player at FCS Holy Cross, and former Div. III nickel Mo Conteh was turning heads in the spring as well.

SPECIALISTS Kicker Reice Griffith was 14-for-17 on field goals last season at Mercer, with half his makes coming from beyond 40 yards. The punter position is up for grabs between returner Emilio Duran and two newcomers. Hammer will be the primary punt returner after leading the MAC in punt return yardage the past two seasons.

FINAL ANALYSIS Jacobs has a track record of success, most recently going 15-1 in Southern Conference play at Mercer the past two seasons. Toledo has not had a losing record in 16 years, and the new staff is confident that this won't be a slow build despite essentially starting with a brand-new roster. How well the Mercer transfer contingent adjusts will determine whether the Rockets can continue to be an upper-level MAC program.

2025 RESULTS (8-5, 6-2 MAC)

Aug. 30	at Kentucky	L	16-24
Sept. 6	WKU	W	45-21
Sept. 13	Morgan State	W	60-0
Sept. 20	at Western Michigan	L	13-14
Sept. 27	Akron	W	45-3
Oct. 11	at Bowling Green	L	23-28
Oct. 18	Kent State	W	45-10
Oct. 25	at Washington State	L	7-28
Nov. 5	Northern Illinois	W	42-3
Nov. 12	at Miami (Ohio)	W	24-3
Nov. 22	Ball State	W	38-9
Nov. 29	at Central Michigan	W	21-3
Dec. 23	vs. Louisville #	L	22-27

#Boca Raton Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	at Michigan State
Sept. 12	Central Conn. St.
Sept. 19	Temple
Sept. 26	San Diego State
Oct. 3	at Ball State
Oct. 10	Buffalo
Oct. 17	at Eastern Michigan
Oct. 24	Western Michigan
Nov. 4	at Sacramento St.
Nov. 11	UMass
Nov. 18	Bowling Green
Nov. 27	at Ohio

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Sharard Vaughn III, LB	★★★
2.	Jake Palucki, IOL	★★★
3.	Seth Elchert, WR	★★★
4.	Tyrell O'Neal, DL	★★★
5.	Ziiyahn Blair, S	★★★
6.	Mac Capen, LB	★★★
7.	Hayden Roy, LB	★★★
8.	Brian Stovall Jr., LB	★★★
9.	Preston Dazey, OT	★★★
10.	Zack Samuel, EDGE	★★★

*Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Mike Jacobs • Record at School: First Season
Career Record: 94-23 (10 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Cris Reisert
Defensive Coordinator: Jahmal Brown • Location: Toledo, Ohio
Stadium: Glass Bowl (26,038)

BRYSON HAMMER

SCOUTING THE ROCKETS

"I thought they were the best team in the MAC last year. A lot of these guys were NFL prospects going into their senior year, and they didn't leave. That speaks to what [former head coach Jason] Candle did there. For the last 10 years, they were the class of the MAC. ... I don't know it's necessarily just the loss of Candle [to UConn]. I think that it's more about the amount of players that they lost vs. what they brought in. They're losing a potential first-round safety [Emmanuel McNeil-Warren], which always hurts, and I think that their tight end that they lost, CC Ezirim [transferred to WKU], is gonna be a really good player. ... Yes, there was relief when Candle left, but [new head coach] Mike Jacobs has won at every level, and he's done a great job."

— An opposing MAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (1)

WR	12	Bryson Hammer (Jr.)	3	Adjatay Dabbs* (Jr.)
WR	9	Kalvin Gilbert Jr.* (Jr.)	1	Rico Bond* (So.)
WR	85	Anthony Simpson* (Sr.)	14	Tashi Braceful (So.)
LT	65	**STEPHEN GALES (SR.)**	71	Matt Hofer (So.)
LG	73	Jonathan Harder (Sr.)	62	Christian Medlock (Jr.)
C	78	Dylan Senda* (Jr.)	50	Luke Rector* (Jr.)
RG	74	Ahmad Carwise* (So.)	69	Dominic Johnson* (So.)
RT	55	Ibrahim Traore (Sr.)	70	Nick Thomas* (Sr.)
TE	88	Jacob Newell* (Sr.)	80	Peyton Strickland* (Sr.)
QB	6	John Alan Richter (Jr.)	7	Khamoni Robinson* (Jr.)
RB	22	CJ Miller* (Jr.)	4	Autavius Ison* (Jr.)

DEFENSE (0)

DE	0	Andrew Zock* (Jr.)	90	Zach Johnson* (So.)
DT	99	Caden Camese* (Sr.)	41	Cam Gwinn (Fr.)
DT	52	Lucas Lambert-Pipkin (Jr.)	96	Nathaniel Chandler (Jr.)
DE	5	Damon Ollison II (Sr.)	2	Ezra Odinjor* (Jr.)
LB	6	Langston Long (Sr.)	44	Isaac Zay (So.)
LB	10	Julian Fox* (Jr.)	13	Kari Jackson* (So.)
CB	11	Hyajah Miller (So.)	25	Tyrell Russell (Fr.)
CB	1	Cam Jones* (Jr.)	23	Israel Petite* (So.)
NB	12	Mo Conteh* (Sr.)	17	Kaleb Hutchinson* (Sr.)
S	22	Nicholas Thompson (Jr.)	39	Dylan Hohler (Jr.)
S	4	Donovan Watkins* (Jr.)	7	Armorion Smith* (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	93	Reice Griffith* (Sr.)	KR	1	Rico Bond* (So.)
P	36	Emilio Duran (Sr.)	PR	12	Bryson Hammer (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

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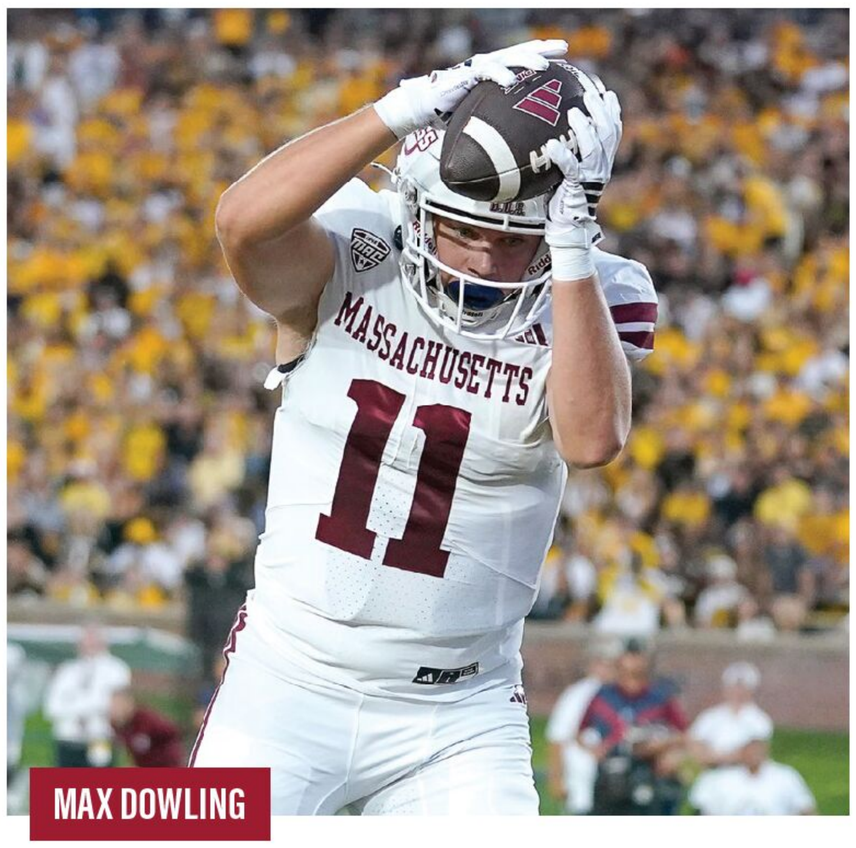

MAX DOWLING

UMASS MINUTEMEN

NATIONAL FORECAST: 138 | MAC PREDICTION: 13 | 2025 RECORD: 0-12, 0-8 MAC

OFFENSE There is excitement surrounding the arrival of quarterback Williams "Pop" Watson III, who was a local star in Springfield before playing for three years at Virginia Tech. Watson could never win the permanent QB1 job in Blacksburg, but he showed flashes and has taken control of a dormant UMass offense that finished last in the nation in scoring average (11.1 ppg) and yards per game (247.5) last season.

Wide receiver T.Y. Harding is back after missing the final nine games last season and should be Watson's top target. Another receiver to watch will be Watson's high school teammate, Joseph Griffin Jr., who comes back to UMass after two years at Boston College and one at Wisconsin. New offensive coordinator Max Warner, who coached tight end Harold Fannin Jr. to All-America status at Bowling Green, will feature tight ends Max Dowling and Reece Adkins.

FCS Murray State transfer Jordan Washington will be the top back behind a revamped offensive line that needed that revamping. Left guard Brock Taylor returns after starting four games last season, with left tackle Greg Knox (FCS McNeese) joining as a transfer and right tackle Zachary Franks coming back from an injury that cost him the season.

DEFENSE The Minutemen welcome two critical players back from injury. Defensive end Joshua Nobles, who might have been the team's top player, missed all of last season. Cornerback TJ Magee will bolster the secondary and also return punts after he missed the final nine games last season.

The linebackers are productive and experienced. Tyler Martin is an All-MAC candidate after recording 104 tackles with an interception and fumble recovery last season. Timmy Hinspeter averaged 9.9 tackles per game in his seven games before an injury ended his campaign.

Both starting safeties — Zeraun Daniel and Kendall Bournes — are back. Transfer Isaiah Reed turned heads in the spring and will pair with Magee at cornerback.

SPECIALISTS Kicker Derek Morris was 10-of-16 on field goals, including 3-of-5 from 50-plus. Australian Edward Phillipson takes over at punter with Magee and Harding giving UMass a threat in the return game.

FINAL ANALYSIS Several key injuries decimated a thin roster last season and kept UMass from being competitive. If the Minutemen can stay healthier and Watson lives up to expectations at quarterback, UMass will be capable of competing most weeks in the MAC. Its 16-game losing streak entering the season is the nation's longest, and the average margin of defeat during the streak is 26.8 points. The streak should end in September with FCS Sacred Heart and Stonehill as well as FBS newcomer Sacramento State on the schedule.

SCOUTING THE MINUTEMEN

"You know what's weird? Now that they're in the MAC, I actually think that it should be a really good job. I think [head coach] Joe Harasymiak is a good coach. There is enough talent because there's no other program like that outside of maybe Delaware in the Northeast, where you have that level of player. Like, not the Power 4 player but not an FCS player, either. ... I think that they'll have a chance at some point because of their investment, but their roster was just so bad. It looks like it's an uphill battle, but unlike the rest of the MAC where they're all fighting over the same players, they're the only game in town in the whole Northeast at that level. They'll have a chance at some point, but I don't know if they can win enough games right now."

— An opposing MAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (2)					
WR	10	T.Y. Harding (Sr.)	9	Devin Matthews* (Jr.)
WR	1	Joseph Griffin Jr.* (Sr.)	3	Elijah Pedro (Fr.)
WR	8	Kezion Dia-Johnson (So.)	17	Dallas Elliott (Sr.)
LT	66	Greg Knox* (Sr.)	77	Jaxon King (Sr.)
LG	69	Brock Taylor (So.)	65	Samu Suominen (Fr.)
C	64	Peyton Miller (Jr.)	75	Tanner Burlingame (So.)
RG	79	Aitor Urionabarrenechea* (Jr.)	65	Samu Suominen (Fr.)
RT	73	Zachary Franks (Sr.)	77	Jaxon King (Sr.)
TE	**11**	**MAX DOWLING (SR.)**	**83**	**REECE ADKINS (SR.)**
QB	5	William Watson III* (Jr.)	2	RJ Johnson III* (Jr.)
RB	0	Jordan Washington* (So.)	23	Elijah Faulkner (So.)
DEFENSE (4)				
DE	2	Joshua Nobles (Sr.)	9	Justin Krueger* (So.)
DT	90	Tim Passmore Jr. (Sr.)	55	Zakar Morris* (So.)
DT	10	Aubrey Melvin* (Fr.)	99	Kamarion Thomas* (Fr.)
DE	42	Andrew DePaepe* (Jr.)	98	William DePaepe* (So.)
LB	**5**	**TYLER MARTIN (SR.)**	6	Joshua Iseah* (Sr.)
LB	**44**	**TIMMY HINSPETER (SR.)**	6	Joshua Iseah* (Sr.)
CB	7	TJ Magee (Sr.)	4	Chris Stanley* (So.)
CB	0	Isaiah Reed* (Sr.)	23	JC Clark (Fr.)
NB	8	Michael Robinson (Sr.)	21	Terron Johnson (Fr.)
S	**3**	**KENDALL BOURNES (SR.)**	1	DD Snyder (Sr.)
S	**38**	**ZERAUN DANIEL (SR.)**	20	Keith Sarkodieh (So.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	99	Derek Morris (Jr.)	KR	10	T.Y. Harding (Sr.)
P	43	Edward Phillipson (So.)	PR	7	TJ Magee (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

2025 RESULTS (0-12, 0-8 MAC)

Aug. 30	Temple	L	10-42
Sept. 6	Bryant	L	26-27
Sept. 13	at Iowa	L	7-47
Sept. 27	at Missouri	L	6-42
Oct. 4	Western Michigan	L	3-21
Oct. 11	at Kent State	L	6-42
Oct. 18	Buffalo	L	21-28
Oct. 25	at Central Michigan	L	13-38
Nov. 4	at Akron	L	10-44
Nov. 12	Northern Illinois	L	3-45
Nov. 18	at Ohio	L	14-42
Nov. 25	Bowling Green	L	14-45

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 3	at Rutgers
Sept. 12	Sacred Heart
Sept. 19	Stonehill
Sept. 26	at Sacramento St.
Oct. 3	Eastern Michigan
Oct. 10	Miami (Ohio)
Oct. 17	at Buffalo
Oct. 24	at UConn
Nov. 4	Ball State
Nov. 11	at Toledo
Nov. 18	Akron
Nov. 28	at Bowling Green

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Aedan McCarthy, QB	★★★
2.	Kareem Pruitt, CB	★★★
3.	Terron Johnson, CB	★★★
4.	Corey Warner, CB	★★★
5.	David Moore Jr., ATH	★★★
6.	Will McNamara, IOL	★★★
7.	Donovan Murphy, EDGE	★★★
8.	CJ Amobi, EDGE	★★★
9.	Samuel Mulbah, DL	★★★
10.	Justin Lewis, RB	★★★

**Per Rivals*

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Joe Harasymiak • Record at School: 0-12 (1 year) • Career Record: 20-27 (4 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Max Warner • Defensive Coordinator: Jared Keyte • Location: Amherst, Mass. • Stadium: Warren McGuirk Alumni Stadium (17,000)

ED ZURGA/GETTY IMAGES

WESTERN MICHIGAN BRONCOS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 87 | MAC PREDICTION: 2 | 2025 RECORD: 10-4, 7-1 MAC

OFFENSE Western Michigan's MAC championship offense ran the ball 67% of the time last season, and that doesn't figure to change much with Offensive Player of the Year Broc Lowry back at quarterback and third-team All-MAC performer Jalen Buckley back at running back. Lowry ran for 963 yards and 14 touchdowns, and Buckley had 1,003 rushing yards and nine touchdowns.

MAC Coach of the Year Lance Taylor is looking for Lowry to make strides in the passing game in his second season as the starter. Lowry completed 63% of his passes with nine TDs and three INTs, but his average of 6.9 yards per attempt could stand to improve.

The offensive line will again be strong, with three returning starters. At center, Jeremy Schleicher should return to action after missing most of 2025 with an injury.

At wide receiver, two of the top three receivers return in Baylin Brooks and Aveion Chenault, and Egypt Nelson turned heads in the spring.

DEFENSE The Broncos will have a tough time matching last year's performance, when the unit allowed only 17.4 points per game to rank ninth nationally. They should be stout again, however. The top three corners are back, including Joshua Franklin, who was a third-team All-MAC selection. John Peters impressed as a true freshman at nickel last season. Safety Micah Davis, a former Michigan signee, returns after a productive season.

Dakari Frazier is ready for an increased role at defensive tackle, and the Broncos added transfers from Ohio State (Ahmed Tounkara) and North Carolina (Austin Alexander).

Linebackers Domanick Moon and Dillon Moore, who combined for 42 tackles in reserve roles, return, and Tennessee transfer Brenden Anes and juco transfer Justyce Betts bolster the unit.

SPECIALISTS Palmer Domschke was 10-for-13 on field goals from beyond 40 yards, and punter Ryan Millmore averaged 42.4 yards per kick with 11 of 50-plus. Juco transfer Kordell Gouldsby returned five kicks for touchdowns in two seasons at Hutchinson (Kan.) Community College.

FINAL ANALYSIS The Broncos lost just one projected returning starter to the transfer portal and were able to bring in 10 Power 4 transfers in the offseason. The defense will have to be rebuilt a bit — the team also lost Nadame Tucker (14.5 sacks, 21 TFLs) — but there is experience there. Expect Lowry to push the passing game forward in Year 2 as a starter. WMU closes with Miami (Ohio) at home, a game that should have MAC title game implications.

2025 RESULTS (10-4, 7-1 MAC)

Aug. 29	at Michigan State	L	6-23
Sept. 6	North Texas (ot)	L	30-33
Sept. 13	at Illinois	L	0-38
Sept. 20	Toledo	W	14-13
Sept. 27	Rhode Island	W	47-14
Oct. 4	at UMass	W	21-3
Oct. 11	Ball State	W	42-0
Oct. 25	at Miami (Ohio)	L	17-26
Nov. 1	Central Michigan	W	24-21
Nov. 11	Ohio	W	17-13
Nov. 18	at Northern Illinois	W	35-19
Nov. 25	at Eastern Michigan	W	31-21
Dec. 6	vs. Miami (Ohio) #	W	23-13
Dec. 19	vs. Kennesaw State %	W	41-6

#Detroit %Myrtle Beach Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	at Michigan
Sept. 12	Monmouth
Sept. 19	at Rice
Sept. 26	Boise State
Oct. 3	at Buffalo
Oct. 10	Kent State
Oct. 17	at Central Michigan
Oct. 24	at Toledo
Oct. 31	Bowling Green
Nov. 10	at Akron
Nov. 17	Eastern Michigan
Nov. 24	Miami (Ohio)

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Ryan Westrich, EDGE	★★★
2.	Jaxson Dosh, QB	★★★
3.	Donovan Triplett, RB	★★★
4.	Brodon Moore, CB	★★★
5.	Max Baker, DL	★★★
6.	Ryan Rocheleau, TE	★★★
7.	Camari Patterson, S	★★★
8.	Justyce Betts, LB	★★★
9.	Angelo Chapman, WR	★★★
10.	Muna Newman-Nwodika, EDGE	★★★

*Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Lance Taylor • Record at School: 20-19 (3 years)
Career Record: 20-19 (3 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Walt Bell
Defensive Coordinators: Greer Martini, Seth Payne • Location: Kalamazoo, Mich. • Stadium: Waldo Stadium (30,200)

JALEN BUCKLEY

SCOUTING THE BRONCOS

"I think they're gonna repeat in the MAC. They're returning a quarterback, returning some key pieces and not losing a lot of guys in the portal. They did a good job of keeping their roster intact as much as they possibly could. The only way that they don't repeat is because in the MAC, any given Tuesday, you've gotta go to Athens, Ohio, or Muncie, Indiana, and they slip up in some game like that. ... I don't think [head coach] Lance Taylor is gonna be there for another year after this one. [The team's success is] a reflection of the athletic department. They're very invested in that university. Everything is going right at that school right now."

— An opposing MAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (7)

WR	8	Egypt Nelson (Jr.)	11	Terence Marshall (So.)
WR	18	**AVEION CHENAULT (SO.)**	5	Kordell Gouldsby* (Jr.)
WR	82	**BAYLIN BROOKS (JR.)**	84	Keivin Boone-Nelson II (Sr.)
LT	76	**CHAD SCHUSTER (SR.)**	73	Ben Roebuck* (So.)
LG	58	Liam Vaughan (Fr.)	71	Brandon Smith* (Sr.)
C	65	Jeremy Schleicher (So.)	64	Nolan Miller (Fr.)
RG	72	**GAVIN DABO (SO.)**	64	Nolan Miller (Fr.)
RT	77	**HUNTER WHITENACK (SR.)**	73	Ben Roebuck* (So.)
TE	15	Adam Parks* (Jr.)	88	Nate Levicki* (Sr.)
QB	12	**BROC LOWRY (JR.)**	13	Mason Reynolds (So.)
RB	6	**JALEN BUCKLEY (SR.)**	24	Ofa "Lolo" Mataele (Sr.)

DEFENSE (3)

DE	2	Scoop Gardner Jr.* (Jr.)	4	Austin Alexander* (So.)
DT	94	Ahmed Tounkara* (So.)	96	Dalton Gustwiller (Jr.)
DT	98	Dakari Frazier (Jr.)	41	Zavian Tibbs* (Sr.)
LB	47	Domanick Moon (Sr.)	3	Brenden Anes* (So.)
LB	12	Dillon Moore (Sr.)	5	Justyce Betts* (So.)
CB	1	**JOSHUA FRANKLIN (SR.)**	22	Amarian Louis (Jr.)
CB	8	**JARVARIUS SIMS (SR.)**	24	John Peters (So.)
S	18	**MICAH DAVIS (JR.)**	19	Braden Steely (So.)
S	6	Joey Pope (Jr.)	21	CJ Miles Jr. (So.)
S	14	Daeh McCullough* (Jr.)		Kouri Crump* (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	20	Palmer Domschke (Sr.)	KR	5	Kordell Gouldsby* (Jr.)
P	25	Ryan Millmore (Jr.)	PR	5	Kordell Gouldsby* (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

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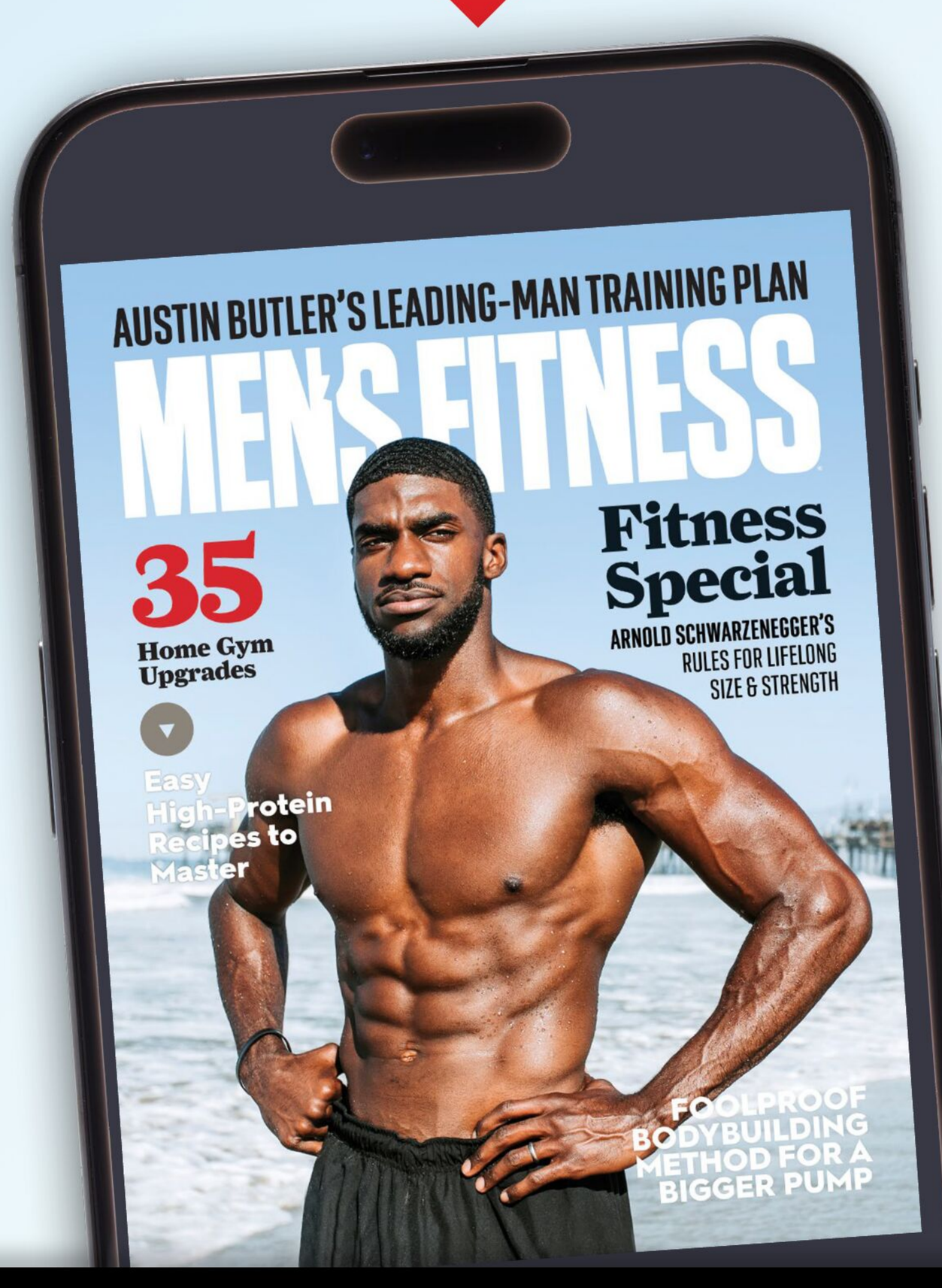

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PREDICTED ORDER OF FINISH

1	UNLV	REBELS
2	NEW MEXICO	LOBOS
3	HAWAI'I	RAINBOW WARRIORS
4	NORTH DAKOTA STATE	BISON
5	AIR FORCE	FALCONS
6	WYOMING	COWBOYS
7	NEVADA	WOLF PACK
8	SAN JOSÉ STATE	SPARTANS
9	UTEP	MINERS
10	NORTHERN ILLINOIS	HUSKIES

MWC CHAMPIONSHIP

UNLV OVER NEW MEXICO

ALL-MWC TEAM

FIRST-TEAM OFFENSE

QB	MICAH ALEJADO	Hawai'i
RB	JAI'DEN THOMAS	UNLV
RB	OWEN ALLEN	Air Force
AP	SCOTTRE HUMPHREY	New Mexico
WR	POFELE ASHLOCK	Hawai'i
WR	TROY OMEIRE	New Mexico
WR	AUDRIC HARRIS	Hawai'i
TE	CADE KEITH	New Mexico
C	KADEN ROBNETT	New Mexico
OL	JACK FOSTER	Nevada
OL	AUSTIN BOYD	UNLV
OL	GRIFFIN EMPEY	North Dakota State
OL	ZACH COCHNAUER	Nevada

FIRST-TEAM DEFENSE

DL	DYLAN LABARBERA	Nevada
DL	KEENAN WILSON	North Dakota State
DL	LUCAS CONTI	UNLV
DL	DARREN AGU	New Mexico
LB	JAXTON ECK	New Mexico
LB	BLAKE FLETCHER	Air Force
LB	ISAAC HUBERT	Air Force
LB	DONOVAN WOOLEN	North Dakota State
CB	ELIJAH PALMER	Hawai'i
CB	DESMAN HEARNS	Wyoming
S	ROGER JONES JR.	Air Force
S	AUSTIN BRAWLEY	New Mexico

FIRST-TEAM SPECIALISTS

K	JOE MCFADDEN	Nevada
P	BART EDMISTON	Wyoming
KR	JACKSON WILLIAMS	North Dakota State
PR	JACKSON WILLIAMS	North Dakota State

BOWL PROJECTIONS

Poinsettia: UNLV vs. San Diego State

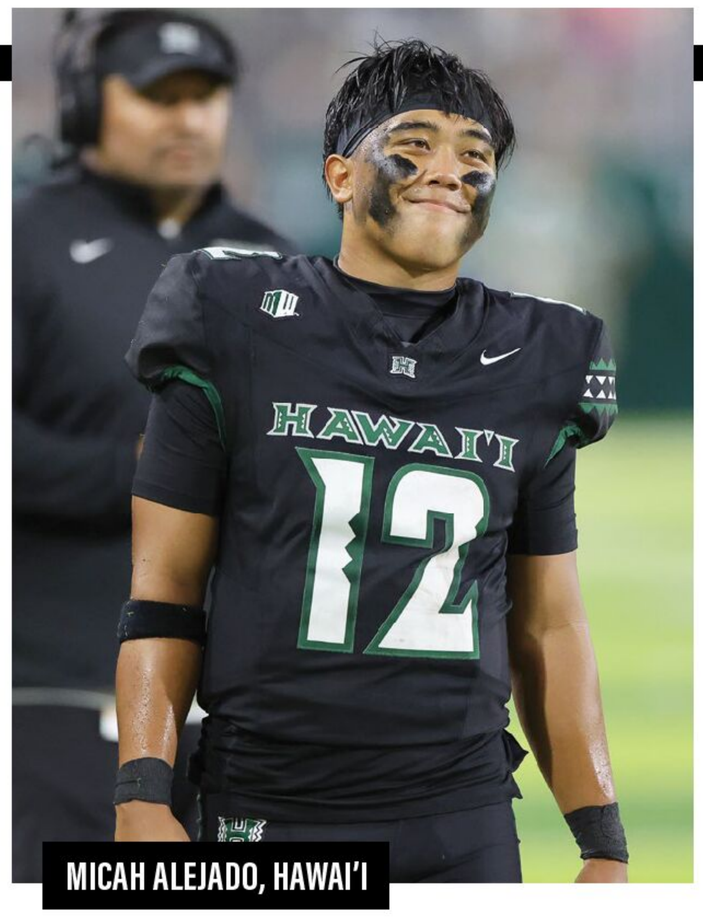
Famous Idaho Potato: North Dakota State vs. Toledo

Hawai'i: Hawai'i vs. UCLA

Arizona: Air Force vs. Ohio

New Mexico: New Mexico vs. UTSA

JOIN COLLEGE FOOTBALL EXPERT STEVEN LASSAN AT ATHLONSPORTS.COM FOR A LOOK AT SECOND- AND THIRD-TEAM SELECTIONS



MICAH ALEJADO, HAWAI'I

JAXTON ECK, NEW MEXICO

JACKSON ARNOLD, UNLV

TOP TRANSFERS

	NAME	POS.	SCHOOL	FORMER SCHOOL
1.	**Jackson Arnold**	QB	UNLV	Auburn
	The former 5-star lands in head coach Dan Mullen's QB-friendly attack.			
2.	**Tyler Hughes**	QB	Wyoming	William & Mary
	A dual-threat in the FCS, Hayes adds a wrinkle to a lackluster offense.			
3.	**EJ Colson**	QB	UTEP	Incarnate Word
	Colson brings high-level accuracy to a team plagued by persistent turnovers.			
4.	**Troy Omeire**	WR	New Mexico	UNLV
	Omeire is a well-traveled contested-catch specialist.			
5.	**Audric Harris**	WR	Hawai'i	Washington
	Harris brings Power 4 experience to a rebuilt receiver room in a pass-happy offense.			
6.	**Caleb Brown**	CB	Hawai'i	Virginia Tech
	Brown is back in the Aloha State to strengthen a secondary in transition.			
7.	**Markell Holman**	RB	Wyoming	Western Illinois
	Holman handled a heavy workload and led the FCS OVC in rushing with 1,064 yards.			
8.	**Taz Reddicks**	WR	UNLV	Oregon State
	Reddicks' arrival helps fill a position of need for the Rebels' high-flying offense.			
9.	**Kene Anene**	OL	North Dakota State	Kansas
	Anene brings FBS experience to the trenches to help ease the Bison's transition.			
10.	**Jacob Norcross**	OL	Nevada	Memphis
	Decorated protector returns to his home state to provide stability up front.			

COORDINATOR CAROUSEL

AIR FORCE
Defense: New: Steve Russ
Old: Brian Knorr

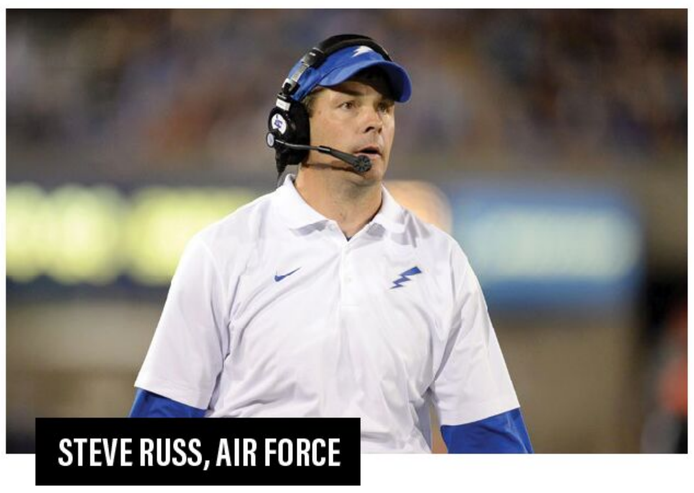
NEVADA
Offense: New: Brett Bartolone
Old: David Gilbertson

NORTHERN ILLINOIS
Offense: New: Tony Petersen, Quinn Sanders; Old: Quinn Sanders

SAN JOSE STATE
Defense: New: Bojay Filimoeatu
Old: Derrick Odum

UTEP
Offense: New: Joe Pappalardo, Lanear Sampson; Old: Mark Cala
Defense: New: Kyle Beyer, Kelvin Sigler
Old: Bobby Daly

WYOMING
Offense: New: Christian Taylor
Old: Jay Johnson



STEVE RUSS, AIR FORCE

RECRUITING RANKINGS BY SCHOOL

1. UNLV (69)
2. New Mexico (70)
3. Northern Illinois (77)
4. UTEP (91)
5. Nevada (93)
6. North Dakota State (100)
7. Wyoming (106)
8. Hawai'i (127)
9. San José State (128)
10. Air Force (138)

Rankings per Rivals; National ranking in parentheses

GAMES TO WATCH

Aug. 29	Memphis at UNLV
Aug. 29	Hawai'i at Stanford
Sept. 5	UNLV at Hawaii
Sept. 5	Wyoming at Colorado State
Sept. 26	New Mexico at New Mexico St.
Oct. 3	Cal at UNLV
Oct. 3	Navy at Air Force
Oct. 10	Hawai'i at Arizona State
Oct. 17	New Mexico at Hawai'i
Nov. 7	Air Force at Army
Nov. 14	UNLV at New Mexico
Nov. 14	North Dakota State at Hawai'i

TOP 10 RECRUITS

	NAME	POS.	SCHOOL	RATING	NAT. RANK
1.	Jordan Njoku	LB	UNLV	★★★	600
2.	Jesse Harden	WR	UNLV	★★★	688
3.	Colin Ford	TE	Wyoming	★★★	761
4.	Bryshawn Brown	QB	Northern Illinois	★★★	926
5.	Aveon Williams	ATH	UNLV	★★★	970
6.	Cade Mitchell	QB	New Mexico	★★★	1,038
7.	Tatum Bell Jr.	WR	UNLV	★★★	1,060
8.	Malik White	IOL	UNLV	★★★	1,155
9.	Perrion Williams	WR	Nevada	★★★	1,189
10.	Derek Garcia	QB	UNLV	★★★	1,235

Rankings per Rivals industry ranking;

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: MARCO GARCIA-IMAGN IMAGES; MARK J. REBILAS-IMAGN IMAGES; JOHN REED-IMAGN IMAGES; RON CHENOY-USA TODAY SPORTS

AIR FORCE FALCONS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 80 | MWC PREDICTION: 5 | 2025 RECORD: 4-8, 3-5 MWC

OFFENSE Air Force found its quarterback of the future last season, and the Falcons should look forward to two more years of Liam Szarka. The junior saw action in 10 games last season before breaking his wrist. He led the Mountain West Conference with 13 rushing touchdowns, was second in the league with 92.2 rushing yards per game and threw nine touchdowns to five interceptions. In each of his first three career starts, he threw for 200-plus yards and rushed 110-plus yards in each, the best three-game start for an Air Force QB in program history.

AFA's second-leading rusher also returns in Owen Allen. The fullback produced five 100-yard games last year.

The offensive line lost two All-MWC players, but two full-time starters are back, along with senior Luke Vonderhaar, who has extensive experience. Expect the Falcons to reload along the line.

The biggest question heading into the fall is the receiver unit, with Jonah Dawson the leading returner with 12 receptions, but AFA runs the ball 80% of the time.

DEFENSE Air Force fell to 10th in the league in total defense last season and allowed 30.3 points per game, as young players took their lumps.

The unit should be markedly improved this season with almost the entire back eight intact after a season of growing pains. Inside linebacker Blake Fletcher was second-team All-MWC last season and should compete for first-team honors after leading the team with 108 tackles. Dallas Daley and Isaac Hubert will be alongside Fletcher in what is expected to be a very solid linebacking corps.

Safety Roger Jones Jr. was an honorable mention All-MWC selection last season and headlines a backline with a ton of returning experience. Corners Mikhail Seiken and Korey Johnson are tested, and safety Max Mustell picked off three passes as a true freshman.

Graduation wiped out the defensive line, and Air Force does not take transfers, so the Falcons will be inexperienced up front.

SPECIALISTS Placekicker Jacob Medina was first-string last season coming out of camp, but he lost his job after missing half of his six field-goal attempts. He had a solid spring and is once again the No. 1 kicker. Will Duncan will be the new punter.

FINAL ANALYSIS After two straight losing seasons, the arrow is pointing up for head coach Troy Calhoun in his 20th season. A veteran quarterback, an experienced defense and a conference that has bid farewell to Boise State and San Diego State, among others, give Air Force the chance to get back over .500 and compete for a top-three spot in the Mountain West.

LIAM SZARKA

SCOUTING THE FALCONS

"Honestly, it's really cool that they don't do the transfer portal. They're not gonna make mistakes, and when you make a mistake, they're gonna make you pay for it. If you turn the ball over against them, it'll kill ya because they're a possession-based team. ... A lot of kids these days who are signing out of high school to go to a Mountain West school, they're happy to go there, but in two or three years, give them truth serum and they'd like to be at a Power 4 school. A lot of [Air Force recruits] are thinking, 'I want to serve.' They recruit a specific type of kid. Now, there's enough evidence that you can still, if you end up being a heck of a ballplayer, reach your NFL dreams and stay there."

— An opposing Mountain West assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)					
WR	8	Jonah Dawson (Jr.)	10	Adam Hrynciw (Sr.)
WR	3	Matt Long (Jr.)	18	Mason Hayes (Jr.)
LT	**52**	**NATHAN ELWOOD (SR.)**	73	Brandon Nazworth (Jr.)
LG	58	TJ Tarascio (Sr.)	**75**	**ALEC FALK (SR.)**
C	51	Rudy Varela (Sr.)	59	Johnique Thomas (Jr.)
RG	72	Jon Ashford (Jr.)	57	Brody Smith (Jr.)
RT	55	Luke Vonderhaar (Sr.)	71	Marcus Roser (Jr.)
TE	80	Simon Kibbee (Sr.)	86	Griffin Stalfort (Sr.)
QB	**9**	**LIAM SZARKA (JR.)**	11	Josh Johnson (Sr.)
FB	2	Owen Allen (Sr.)	28	Gage LaDue (Jr.)
TB	44	Rocco Conti (Sr.)	26	Jalen Rashad Turner (Sr.)
DEFENSE (5)				
DE	50	Grady Forsythe (Jr.)	45	Jaylin Reese (Jr.)
NG	97	Bennett Williams (Jr.)	99	Jayden Oquendo (Sr.)
DT	59	Chaz Barnett (Jr.)	93	Andrew Tillett (Sr.)
OLB	**30**	**ISAAC HUBERT (SR.)**	92	Connor Vasek (So.)
MLB	**6**	**BLAKE FLETCHER (SR.)**	0	Luke Fisher (Sr.)
OLB	8	Dallas Daley (Sr.)	51	Vinnie Canosa (Jr.)
CB	2	Korey Johnson (Jr.)	10	Jerome Drain (So.)
CB	**4**	**MIKHAIL SEIKEN (JR.)**	9	Jaris McIntosh (Sr.)
NB	26	Alexander Perez (So.)	31	Jayden Malbranche (So.)
SS	**5**	**ROGER JONES JR. (JR.)**	19	Houston Hendrix (Sr.)
FS	25	Cade Paterson (So.)	**36**	**MAX MUSTELL (SO.)**
SPECIALISTS				
K	39	Jacob Medina (Jr.)	KR	3	Matt Long (Jr.)
P	94	Will Duncan (Jr.)	PR	3	Matt Long (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

2025 RESULTS (4-8, 3-5 MWC)

Aug. 30	Bucknell	W	49-13
Sept. 13	at Utah State	L	30-49
Sept. 20	Boise State	L	37-49
Sept. 27	Hawai'i	L	35-44
Oct. 4	at Navy	L	31-34
Oct. 11	at UNLV	L	48-51
Oct. 18	Wyoming	W	24-21
Nov. 1	Army	L	17-20
Nov. 8	at San José State	W	26-16
Nov. 15	at UConn	L	16-26
Nov. 22	New Mexico	L	3-20
Nov. 28	at Colorado State	W	42-21

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	Duquesne
Sept. 12	North Dakota State
Sept. 26	at Nevada
Oct. 3	Navy
Oct. 10	at Northern Illinois
Oct. 17	UNLV
Oct. 24	at Wyoming
Oct. 31	UConn
Nov. 7	at Army
Nov. 14	San José State
Nov. 21	UTEP
Nov. 28	at New Mexico

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

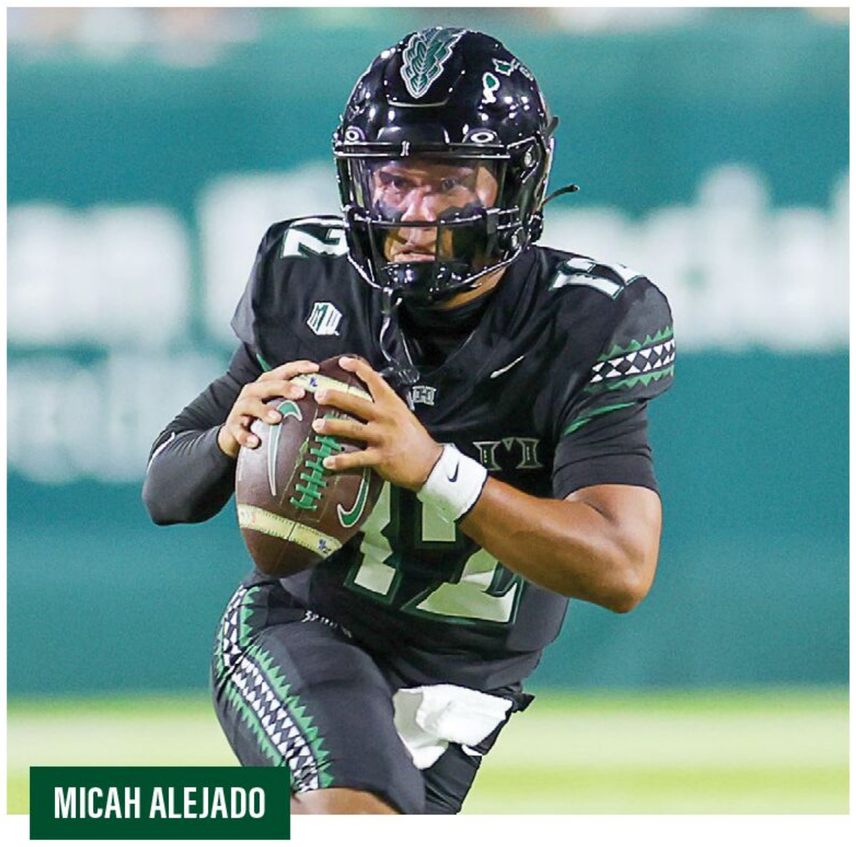
1.	Knight Wilson, S	★★★
2.	Merrik Bloomgren, WR	★★★
3.	Wes Burford, ATH	★★★
4.	Blaze Jones, EDGE	★★★
5.	Case Vanden Bosch, QB	★★★
6.	Damian Horace, S	★★★
7.	Dominic Basrawala, EDGE	★★★
8.	Kobe Dooley, WR	★★★
9.	Brody Sieck, EDGE	★★★
10.	Xander Shaw, DL	★★★

**Per Rivals*

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Troy Calhoun • Record at School: 139-97 (19 years) • Career Record: 139-97 (19 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Mike Thiessen • Defensive Coordinator: Steve Russ • Location: Colorado Springs, Colo. • Stadium: Falcon Stadium (39,441)

ISAIAH J. DOWNING-IMAGN IMAGES



MICAH ALEJADO

SCOUTING THE RAINBOW WARRIORS

"They're absolutely a legitimate contender in the Mountain West. That home-field advantage is real. That culture, they play hard, hard, hard. [Head coach] Timmy Chang being an alumni there, he just gets it. ... I'm sure that they'll find athletes and guys to replace what they lost on the defensive side. ... That quarterback [Micah Alejado] is legit. The system, the 'Spread N' Shred,' it works, and when it's clicking on all cylinders, it's hard to defend. [Alejado] was only a redshirt freshman, and he knew where to go with the ball. He made quick and decisive decisions. He played in that system like he had been playing in it for three years already. That was impressive about him. The likelihood of him regressing is probably very small."

— An opposing Mountain West assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)				
WR	7	Tre' Griffiths* (So.)	3	Carson Brown* (Sr.)
WR	**5**	**POFELE ASHLOCK (SR.)**	18	Blaze Kamoku (Sr.)
WR	2	Audric Harris* (Jr.)	8	Tama Uiliata (So.)
WR	17	Nick Delgadillo (Jr.)	4	Jarvis Heimuli (So.)
LT	56	Boogie Henderson (So.)	75	Khalil Walker* (Jr.)
LG	62	Lautaimi Manuma (So.)	58	Denaris DeRosa Jr.* (Sr.)
C	**57**	**ETHAN SPENCER (SR.)**	50	Tu'i Muti (So.)
RG	79	Judah Kaio (Sr.)	73	Lipe Moala* (Jr.)
RT	**52**	**DEAN BRISKI (SR.)**	75	Khalil Walker* (Jr.)
QB	**12**	**MICAH ALEJADO (SO.)**	10	Bjorn Jurgensen* (Fr.)
RB	0	Cam Barfield (Sr.)	1	DeVon Rice* (So.)
DEFENSE (3)				
DE	**51**	**LESTERLAISENE LAGAFUAINA (JR.)**	56	Spencer Elliott* (Sr.)
NT	95	Geoffrey Speight* (Sr.)	91	Josh Sagapolutele (Jr.)
DT	52	Luther McCoy (Sr.)	97	Jordan Lynch (So.)
DE	10	Ka'eo Akana (Sr.)	5	Ha'aheo Dela Cruz (So.)
LB	12	Wynden Ho'ohuli (Sr.)	42	Matteus Ioane (So.)
LB	**11**	**JAMIH OTIS (SR.)**	12	Matteus Ioane (So.)
CB	1	Caleb Brown* (Sr.)	6	Zion Allen (Sr.)
CB	0	Jeremiah Hughes* (Sr.)	13	Elijah Gipson (Sr.)
NB	**4**	**ELIJAH PALMER (SR.)**	21	Makana Meyer (Jr.)
S	25	Matagi Thompson (Sr.)	3	Joenel Figueroa* (Sr.)
S	2	Kona Moore (Sr.)	24	Kodi DeCambra* (Jr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	98	Sean Olvera-Harle (Sr.)	KR	0 Cam Barfield (Sr.)
P	47	Gehrig Heil* (Fr.)	PR	8 Tama Uiliata (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** · *2026 TRANSFER

MARCO GARCIA-IMAGN IMAGES

HAWAI'I RAINBOW WARRIORS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 77 | MWC PREDICTION: 3 | 2025 RECORD: 9-4, 5-3 MWC

OFFENSE It all starts with quarterback Micah Alejado, who is coming off a season in which he earned Mountain West Freshman of the Year honors. He averaged 282.4 passing yards per game and completed 66% of his passes in head coach Timmy Chang's four-wide, spread attack. Alejado had 24 touchdown passes and nine interceptions and also rushed for a score. His quick decision-making and understanding of where to go with the ball were critical for an offense that was eighth nationally in passing.

The two slot receivers look strong once again. Pofele Ashlock is a fourth-year starter who has averaged 73 catches and 763 yards in his first three seasons. Joining him is Washington transfer Audric Harris, who had limited production with the Huskies but looks ready to break out in this offense. The outside receivers are lesser-known quantities.

Cam Barfield moves into the RB1 role after seeing significant action in 2025 with 80 carries for 371 yards, 27 catches for 257 yards and eight total touchdowns. Kansas State transfer DeVon Rice will back him up.

The offensive line welcomes back center Ethan Spencer and right tackle Dean Briski as starters, and Denaris DeRosa Jr. is a highly regarded transfer from San José State.

DEFENSE Hawai'i has only three starters back on a unit that ranked sixth in the conference in total defense. Gone are two all-league players on the defensive line, leaving athletic junior end Lesterlaisene Lagafuaina as the clear leader up front. He had eight tackles for a loss last season.

At linebacker, senior Jamih Otis was an honorable mention All-Mountain West selection last season but tore his ACL in November. He is a leader on defense, but it is unclear if and when he will be able to return. Senior Wynden Ho'ohuli will be the unit's top player until Otis' return.

The defensive backs have depth and some playing experience despite returning only one starter. Elijah Palmer was an honorable mention All-MWC pick and will be starting for his fourth season at nickelback. Caleb Brown returns to Hawai'i after one year at Virginia Tech, and Matagi Thompson started three games at safety.

SPECIALISTS Sean Olvera-Harle will replace All-America placekicker Kansei Matsuzawa after serving as the kickoff specialist last season. Texas transfer Gehrig Heil is battling for the punter spot. Barfield was second-team All-MWC as a return specialist.

FINAL ANALYSIS Hawai'i is a legit threat to win the conference if its defense can come around. Alejado's experience is a huge plus, and he has skilled playmakers. Hawai'i hosts three other contenders — UNLV, New Mexico and North Dakota State — which could prove to be the difference.

2025 RESULTS (9-4, 5-3 MWC)

Aug. 23	Stanford	W	23-20
Aug. 30	at Arizona	L	6-40
Sept. 6	Sam Houston	W	37-20
Sept. 13	Portland State	W	23-3
Sept. 20	Fresno State	L	21-23
Sept. 27	at Air Force	W	44-35
Oct. 11	Utah State	W	44-26
Oct. 18	at Colorado State	W	31-19
Nov. 1	at San José State	L	38-45
Nov. 8	San Diego State	W	38-6
Nov. 21	at UNLV	L	10-38
Nov. 29	Wyoming	W	27-7
Dec. 24	vs. Cal #	W	35-31

#Hawai'i Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Aug. 29	at Stanford
Sept. 5	UNLV
Sept. 12	New Mexico State
Sept. 26	at Wyoming
Oct. 3	San José State
Oct. 10	at Arizona State
Oct. 17	New Mexico
Oct. 24	at Northern Illinois
Nov. 7	at UTEP
Nov. 14	North Dakota State
Nov. 21	at Nevada
Nov. 28	Sacramento State

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Andrew Price, OT	★★★
2.	Robert Haynes IV, WR	★★★
3.	Kydel Stone, CB	★★★
4.	Jahren Altura, CB	★★★
5.	Maika Eugenio, QB	★★★
6.	Christian Sanford-Tupuola, TE	★★★
7.	Marquis Richardson, S	★★★
8.	Isaiah Nickels, WR	★★★
9.	Cooper Troy, IOL	★★★
10.	Vainuupo Fanuaea, TE	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Timmy Chang • Record at School: 22-29 (4 years)
Career Record: 22-29 (4 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Anthony Arceneaux
Defensive Coordinator: Dennis Thurman • Location: Honolulu, Hawai'i.
Stadium: Clarence T. C. Ching Athletics Complex (15,194)

NEVADA WOLF PACK

NATIONAL FORECAST: 113 | MWC PREDICTION: 7 | 2025 RECORD: 3-9, 2-6 MWC

OFFENSE There is plenty of room for improvement for the Nevada offense, and that starts at quarterback. Wolf Pack QBs, including this year's projected starter, Carter Jones, threw 10 TDs and 17 INTs last season, which was the worst ratio in the country. Jones was a true freshman forced into action earlier than the staff would have liked, but he is making strides as he tries to hold off UCLA transfer Luke Duncan for the No. 1 job in new offensive coordinator Brett Bartolone's system.

Herschel Turner figures to earn the No. 1 running back job after averaging 5.1 yards per carry last season. Dominic Kelley flashed as a freshman power back.

Nevada lost its top five receivers from last season, so transfers will play key roles. The Wolf Pack will lean heavily on senior Damien Morgan, who was productive at FCS Idaho State. Gary Givens III comes in from Northern Illinois after limited production. Marshaun Brown is the leading returner with 16 catches last season.

The offensive line returns two starters and brought in some impact transfers, so this group could set a foundation for the offense.

DEFENSE Nevada has a chance to be solid on defense thanks to the return of a potential All-Mountain West player at each level. Defensive end Dylan LaBarbera will be a candidate for MWC Defensive Player of the Year and looks to have an NFL future after recording a league-best 17 tackles for a loss. Defensive tackle Logologo Va'a also returns.

At linebacker, EJ Smith missed the second half of last season due to injury but had become one of the team's leaders and should have a big year. Colorado State transfer Jeremy Naborne-Owens saw significant action with the Rams last season.

In the secondary, cornerback Aiden Walker emerged during his true freshman season and projects as the team's top player along the back line. At the other corner, Bryson Snelling has starting experience, and starting safety Bishop Turner also returns.

SPECIALISTS Senior placekicker Joe McFadden was 19-for-25 on field goals last season, with a long of 50 yards. There will be a new Australian punter for the Wolf Pack as Ewan Baulch and Jacob Fernandez are coming to the U.S. to vie for the job.

FINAL ANALYSIS Nevada's four-year bowl drought is the program's longest since 1997-2004, and it may be an uphill climb to end it this season. There are wins to be found on the schedule, but to get to six, a jump forward will be needed in the passing game with either Jones or Duncan at the controls.

CARTER JONES

SCOUTING THE WOLF PACK

"They're a team that lost a ton in the portal both offensively and defensively. They do return their best pass-rusher [Dylan LaBarbera]. That dude is damn good. We called him 'Captain Insano' when we played him last year. That dude's a stud. We couldn't block the guy. They return him and [quarterback] Carter Jones, who finished out the year. ... I think they're gonna be fine. They're gonna be very young still, just based on what they signed. They brought in a couple of receivers that had some production, but what they lost is still gonna be hard to replace. I think that they'll be very similar to last year."

— An opposing Mountain West assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)

WR	11	Damien Morgan* (Sr.)	85	Donnie Cheers* (Jr.)
WR	7	Gary Givens III* (Jr.)	3	Jaceon Doss* (Sr.)
WR	9	Marshaun Brown (Jr.)	8	Daijon Calimon (So.)
LT	**55**	**JACK FOSTER (SR.)**	67	RJ Esmon (Jr.)
LG	70	Snoop Leota-Amaama (Sr.)	72	Ethan Newman (Jr.)
C	59	Jacob Norcross* (Jr.)	58	Ethan Lowell (So.)
RG	72	Ethan Newman* (Jr.)	70	Snoop Leota-Amaama (Sr.)
RT	**76**	**ZACH COCHNAUER (SR.)**	73	Tyler Miller (So.)
TE	16	DJ Asiasi (Fr.)	82	Jayden O'Rourke (Sr.)
QB	**6**	**CARTER JONES (SO.)**	12	Luke Duncan* (Jr.)
RB	1	Herschel Turner (Jr.)	0	Dominic Kelley (So.)

DEFENSE (2)

DE	**32**	**DYLAN LABARBERA (SR.)**	3	Kameron Brown (Fr.)
DT	10	Logologo Va'a (Sr.)	98	David Paine Jr. (So.)
DT	96	Tanner Vaughan (Sr.)	98	David Paine Jr. (So.)
DE	92	Myles Williams (Sr.)	4	Brandon Amaniampong* (Jr.)
LB	**2**	**EJ SMITH (SR.)**	11	Poasa Utu* (Jr.)
LB	1	Jeremy Naborne-Owens* (Sr.)	44	Alosio Maluia (So.)
CB	18	Aiden Walker (So.)	0	Joshua Scott* (Sr.)
CB	12	Bryson Snelling (Jr.)	0	Joshua Scott* (Sr.)
NB	0	Joshua Scott* (Sr.)	7	Selman Bridges* (So.)
S	15	Bishop Turner (Jr.)	22	Jaylen Webb* (Jr.)
S	8	Larry Turner-Gooden* (Sr.)	22	Jaylen Webb* (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	84	Joe McFadden (Sr.)	KR 25	Ky Woods (Sr.)
P	95	Ewan Baulch (Fr.)	PR 14	Gerick Robinson (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

ANDY BARRON

2025 RESULTS (3-9, 2-6 MWC)

Aug. 30	at Penn State	L	11-46
Sept. 6	Sacramento State	W	20-17
Sept. 13	Middle Tennessee	L	13-14
Sept. 20	at WKU	L	16-31
Oct. 4	at Fresno State	L	17-20
Oct. 11	San Diego State	L	10-44
Oct. 18	at New Mexico	L	22-24
Oct. 24	Boise State	L	3-24
Nov. 8	at Utah State	L	14-51
Nov. 15	San José State	W	55-10
Nov. 22	at Wyoming	W	13-7
Nov. 29	UNLV	L	17-42

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	WKU
Sept. 12	Montana State
Sept. 19	at Middle Tenn.
Sept. 26	Air Force
Oct. 10	at UTEP
Oct. 17	at North Dakota St.
Oct. 24	San José State
Oct. 31	at UCLA
Nov. 7	New Mexico
Nov. 14	at Northern Illinois
Nov. 21	Hawai'i
Nov. 28	at UNLV

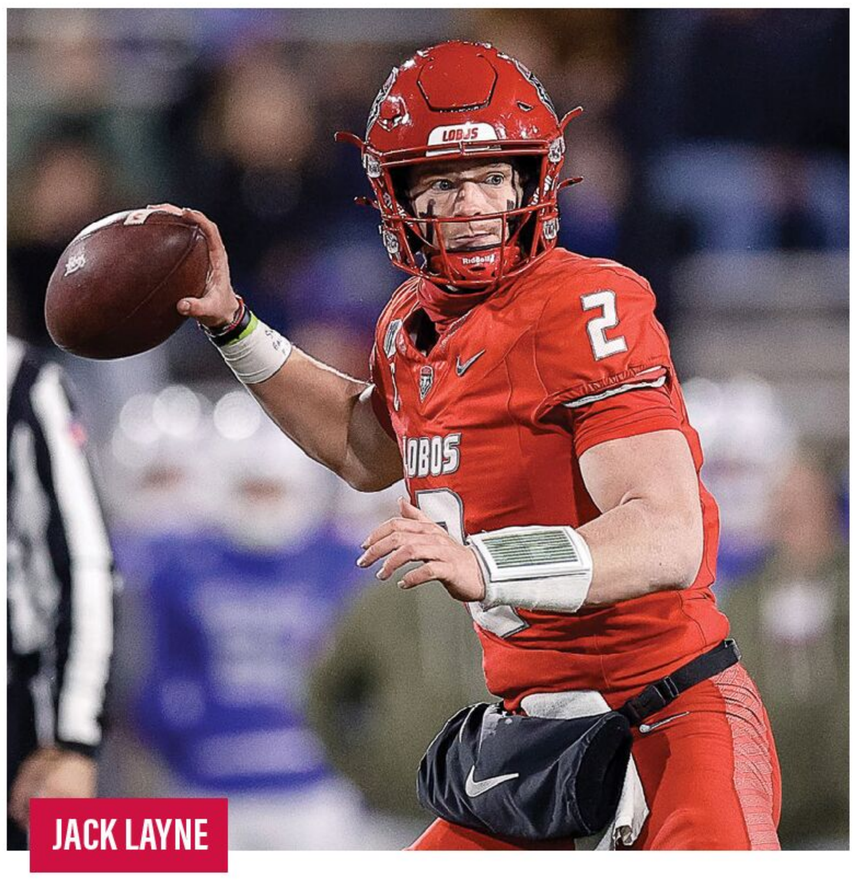
TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Janerious Jackson, RB	★★★
2.	Colton Hogge, OT	★★★
3.	Joe Stimpson, WR	★★★
4.	Perrion Williams, WR	★★★
5.	Isaiah Williams, WR	★★★
6.	Mekai Smith, RB	★★★
7.	Bronwyn Rios, RB	★★★
8.	Sam Davidson IV, EDGE	★★★
9.	Terrence Johnson, OT	★★★
10.	CJ Mooring, RB	★★★

**Per Rivals*

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Jeff Choate • Record at School: 6-19 (2 years) • Career Record: 34-41 (6 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Brett Bartolone • Defensive Coordinator: Kane Ioane • Location: Reno, Nev. • Stadium: Mackay Stadium (27,000)



JACK LAYNE

SCOUTING THE LOBOS

"[Head coach] Jason Eck definitely has a great program. He's a successful head coach going back to his Idaho days. His son [linebacker Jaxton Eck] is what makes their defense go. He is truly the heartbeat of that defense. I know their defensive coordinator [Spence Nowinsky] is a really good coach with a really good scheme. I don't know that they would ever be the Group of 6 team in the playoff, but they can definitely be a team that gets to a good bowl game. ... I don't think Eck will be there long. Our staff thinks that when Luke Fickell gets let go at Wisconsin, that's Eck's job if he does what he's supposed to do this year. They're a sleeper to win the league."

— An opposing Mountain West assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (7)					
WR	5	Troy Omeire* (Sr.)	6	Zhaiel Smith (So.)
WR	0	Miles Williams* (Sr.)	11	Massiah Mingo (Fr.)
WR	1	**SHAWN MILLER (SR.)**	14	DJ Darling (Fr.)
LT	79	Cole Millward (Jr.)	55	Elvin Harris (Sr.)
LG	51	**MALIK ALIANE (SR.)**	77	Tevin Shaw (Sr.)
C	59	**KADEN ROBNETT (SO.)**	54	JoJo Matautia (Fr.)
RG	58	**JAYMAR TASI (SO.)**	77	Tevin Shaw (Sr.)
RT	68	**TYLER LAWRENCE (JR.)**	55	Elvin Harris (Jr.)
TE	88	**CADE KEITH (SO.)**	7	Tripp Walsh (Jr.)
QB	2	**JACK LAYNE (SR.)**	10	Luke Moga* (So.)
RB	22	Scottre Humphrey (Sr.)	8	Deshaun Buchanan (Jr.)
DEFENSE (5)				
DE	10	Darren Agu (Sr.)	32	Trent Rocker (Jr.)
DT	15	Xavier Slayton (Sr.)	92	**BRIAN BOOKER (SR.)**
DT	94	Jalen McIver (Jr.)	88	AJ Robinson (Jr.)
DE	22	Jalen Charles* (So.)	36	Albert Tuakalau* (Jr.)
LB	6	**JAXTON ECK (JR.)**	18	Clay Martineau* (So.)
LB	2	**MERCURY SWAIM (SR.)**	23	Nick Wheeler (Fr.)
CB	5	Frankie Edwards III (Jr.)	9	Eric McClain* (Jr.)
CB	8	Ormanie Arnold* (Sr.)	1	Jahmir Torres (So.)
NB	13	Chris Gant Jr. (So.)	17	Will Hicks* (Jr.)
S	7	**TAVIAN COMBS (SR.)**	3	**CJ MCBEAN (SO.)**
S	0	Austin Brawley (Sr.)	12	Drew Speech (Sr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	41	Nick Romero* (So.)	KR	2	Abraham Williams (Sr.)
P	35	Charles Steinkamp (Sr.)	PR	0	Austin Brawley (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

ISAIAH J. DOWNING-IMAGN IMAGES

NEW MEXICO LOBOS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 61 | MWC PREDICTION: 2 | 2025 RECORD: 9-4, 6-2 MWC

OFFENSE Starting quarterback Jack Layne is back after completing 65% of his passes and averaging 191 yards per game with 13 TDs and 10 interceptions. Layne was a limited participant in spring drills, and he may have competition in the fall from Oregon transfer Luke Moga. The former 4-star prospect left the Ducks when Dante Moore returned to school.

A pair of transfers could be the team's top two pass-catchers. Troy Omeire, who has played at Texas, Arizona State and UNLV, had 31 catches for 514 yards and five TDs for the Rebels last year. Miles Williams comes in from FCS Eastern Washington and is expected to be a heavy lifter in the passing game. Cade Keith will be an All-Mountain West candidate in an offense that emphasizes the tight end.

The running back room is deep, with Scottre Humphrey the leading returning rusher with 349 yards. Humphrey got off to a fast start but never quite recovered from an injury in Week 3. Cameron Mathews comes in after a redshirt year at Memphis.

The offensive line returns four starters but still has a few question marks. Center Kaden Robnett is an All-MWC candidate.

DEFENSE This unit has the potential to be the league's best. MWC Defensive Player of the Year Jaxton Eck averaged nearly 10 tackles per game from his linebacker spot. He is joined by Mercury Swaim, who emerged late last year and is an All-MWC candidate as well in the middle of the defense. The Lobos led the league in rushing defense last season.

Up front, former FCS Idaho transfer Xavier Slayton beat out Brian Booker, who was an honorable mention All-MWC pick at defensive tackle. Former Vanderbilt transfer Darren Agu is in for a big season in his second year at New Mexico.

Tavian Combs, CJ McBean and Austin Brawley were all productive at safety last year and earned starting assignments. Cornerback Ormanie Arnold is a transfer from Cincinnati who will get immediate playing time.

SPECIALISTS Abraham Williams returned five kickoffs for touchdowns at FCS Weber State in 2022 and '23 and had six total returns last year in his first season at New Mexico. Charles Steinkamp will be the punter after serving as the kickoff specialist the past two seasons. There will be a three-way kicker battle in fall camp.

FINAL ANALYSIS Head coach Jason Eck worked wonders last season in winning nine games in Year 1, and the Lobos are among the league favorites this season. The defense will be among the best in the MWC, and if the offensive line jells and one of the two quarterbacks emerges, the Lobos will appear in their first Mountain West Championship Game.

2025 RESULTS (9-4, 6-2 MWC)

Aug. 30	at Michigan	L	17-34
Sept. 6	Idaho State	W	32-22
Sept. 12	at UCLA	W	35-10
Sept. 27	New Mexico State	W	38-20
Oct. 3	at San José State	L	28-35
Oct. 11	at Boise State	L	25-41
Oct. 18	Nevada	W	24-22
Oct. 25	Utah State	W	33-14
Nov. 1	at UNLV	W	40-35
Nov. 15	Colorado State	W	20-17
Nov. 22	at Air Force	W	20-3
Nov. 28	San Diego State (ot)	W	23-17
Dec. 26	vs. Minnesota # (ot)	L	17-20

#Rate Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	Central Michigan
Sept. 12	Mercyhurst
Sept. 19	at Oklahoma
Sept. 26	at New Mexico St.
Oct. 3	UTEP
Oct. 17	at Hawai'i
Oct. 24	North Dakota State
Oct. 31	at San José State
Nov. 7	at Nevada
Nov. 14	UNLV
Nov. 21	at Wyoming
Nov. 28	Air Force

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Cade Mitchell, QB	★★★★
2.	DJ Darling, WR	★★★
3.	Brody Litton, OT	★★★
4.	Jvon Hatcher, DL	★★★
5.	Jaron Liles, WR	★★★
6.	Massiah Mingo, WR	★★★
7.	Max Leeper, TE	★★★
8.	Ricklan Holmes II, LB	★★★
9.	Brendan Alexander, IOL	★★★
10.	Albert Tuakalau, EDGE	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Jason Eck • Record at School: 9-4 (1 year)
Career Record: 35-17 (4 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Luke Schleusner
Defensive Coordinator: Spence Nowinsky • Location: Albuquerque, N.M.
Stadium: University Stadium: (39,224)

NORTH DAKOTA STATE BISON

NATIONAL FORECAST: 78 | MWC PREDICTION: 4 | 2025 RECORD: 12-1, 8-0 MVFC

OFFENSE Senior quarterback Nathan Hayes will take the reins after being QB2 on last season's 12-1 team that lost a heartbreaker in the second round of the FCS playoffs. Hayes saw limited action in 10 games last season, but he will now be responsible for directing the offense as it moves up a level to the FBS Mountain West Conference. Hayes is a running threat and has good speed and a strong arm at 6-foot-3, 218 pounds.

Three starters are back along the offensive line, and Kansas transfer Kene Anene looks like an immediate fit at right tackle. Head coach Tim Polasek, who is entering his third season, should be able to rely on this group.

The skill positions have some unknowns. Running back DJ Scott averaged 7.3 carries per game last year and finished the year with 502 yards, and he will likely try to double those numbers as the lead back for 2026. Redshirt freshman Myles Mitchell will have a larger role as well, and incoming freshman Braylon Toliver could earn serious playing time.

Tight end Reis Kessel returns after averaging an impressive 22.3 yards per catch last season. The leading wideout is Jackson Williams, who started two games and had 293 receiving yards for the season. Young players will need to step up.

DEFENSE The Bison lost defensive captain and linebacker Nathaniel Staehling on the final day of the portal period to Michigan, weakening what looked like a stellar linebacking corps. All-conference junior Donovan Woolen is back, but there will be inexperience around him. Freshman Gavin Sell will get a long look.

Starting safeties Darius Givance and Taylen Eady have solid depth behind them. At cornerback, there are questions. Two Division II transfers arrive to help replace both starters who transferred, and there are four players at the position who were depth pieces a year ago.

On the line, all-conference performer Keenan Wilson leads the group from his defensive tackle spot.

SPECIALISTS Drew Klein takes over the placekicking duties after making his only attempt from 46 yards a year ago. Punter Aaron Bickerton is back after averaging 45.4 yards per boot in 2025.

FINAL ANALYSIS It will not be a surprise to see North Dakota State elevate and make the adjustment to the Mountain West given its long history of success. The respective lines are usually a concern when you step up a level, but NDSU should be fine there. If some wide receivers develop for Hayes, and some defensive backs emerge, the Bison could be a fringe contender in the MWC in Year 1.

DONOVAN WOOLEN

SCOUTING THE BISON

"That transition is not going to be as [difficult] as maybe people outside the sport think it's gonna be. All the coaches who are in the know, they know who North Dakota State is. I think those guys are going to be contending in the Mountain West. They moved up and paid all that money because they felt good about where they are from a talent standpoint. I just don't think you make that move if you look at your roster and go, 'Man, I don't know how good we are.' ... You look at the amount of guys that they've put in the NFL, they have a confidence in how they develop. Yeah, they lost their quarterback and top receiver, but the rest of us don't know who they have behind them. They do, and they feel very confident in the guys they have."

— An opposing Mountain West assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)					
WR	18	Jackson Williams (Jr.)	83	Cade Osterman (Jr.)
WR	15	Mekhi Collins (Sr.)	84	Logan Conklin (So.)
WR	17	Isiah St. Romain (So.)	21	Chris Kiel (Fr.)
LT	76	Ryan Babatz (So.)	57	Gavin Wang (Fr.)
LG	**71**	**NATE TASTAD (SO.)**	66	Jack Liwienski (Jr.)
C	**62**	**GRIFFIN EMPEY (JR.)**	61	Gage Schmidt (So.)
RG	**75**	**JOSH MAGIN (SR.)**	72	Nate Schneckloth (Jr.)
RT	55	Kene Anene* (So.)	78	Noah Stommes (So.)
TE	81	Reis Kessel (So.)	40	Kaden Zenzen (Sr.)
QB	2	Nathan Hayes (Sr.)	10	Trey Drake (Jr.)
RB	7	DJ Scott (Jr.)	5	Myles Mitchell (Fr.)
DEFENSE (5)				
DE	11	Matthew Stenbroten (So.)	0	Victor Isele (Jr.)
DT	**8**	**KEENAN WILSON (JR.)**	54	Alijah Wayne (So.)
DT	94	Logan Larson (Sr.)	95	Zach Vanderpool (So.)
DE	**9**	**KELTON MCCASLIN (SR.)**	93	Anthony Okes* (Jr.)
LB	**1**	**DONOVAN WOOLEN (JR.)**	41	Peder Haugo (So.)
LB	52	Keith Williams* (Jr.)	55	Oliver Lucht (Jr.)
LB	3	Gavin Sell (Fr.)	50	Damian Devine (Fr.)
CB	2	EJ Davis* (So.)	16	Marion Moore (Fr.)
CB	12	DJ Voltz* (Sr.)	4	Najee Nelson (Jr.)
S	**29**	**DARIUS GIVANCE (SR.)**	**6**	**JAYLIN CRUMBY (JR.)**
S	14	Taylen Eady (So.)	20	Will Steil (So.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	37	Drew Klein (Sr.)	KR	18	Jackson Williams (Jr.)
P	39	Aaron Bickerton (Sr.)	PR	18	Jackson Williams (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

2025 RESULTS (12-1, 8-0 FCS MVFC)

Aug. 30	at The Citadel	W	38-0
Sept. 6	at Tennessee State	W	59-3
Sept. 13	SE Missouri State	W	41-14
Sept. 27	South Dakota	W	51-13
Oct. 4	at Illinois State	W	33-16
Oct. 11	Southern Illinois	W	45-17
Oct. 18	at Indiana State	W	38-7
Oct. 25	at South Dakota State	W	38-7
Nov. 1	Youngstown State	W	38-30
Nov. 8	at North Dakota	W	15-10
Nov. 15	Northern Iowa	W	48-16
Nov. 22	St. Thomas (MN)	W	62-7
Dec. 6	Illinois State #	L	28-29

#FCS Playoff Second Round

2026 SCHEDULE

Aug. 29	Jacksonville State
Sept. 5	Fordham
Sept. 12	at Air Force
Sept. 19	at Sacramento St.
Oct. 3	Wyoming
Oct. 10	at UNLV
Oct. 17	Nevada
Oct. 24	at New Mexico
Oct. 31	UTEP
Nov. 14	at Hawai'i
Nov. 21	Northern Illinois
Nov. 28	at San José State

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Braylon Toliver, RB	★★★
2.	Gunner Thielges, S	★★★
3.	Kye Schlichting, WR	★★★
4.	Joaquin Jordan, WR	★★★
5.	Hank Nelson, QB	★★★
6.	Trey McPartland, OT	★★★
7.	Myles Ellis, WR	★★★
8.	Tucker Thieneman, OT	★★★
9.	Jason Hunter Jr., DL	★★★
10.	Brandon Walton, S	★★★

*Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Tim Polasek • Record at School: 26-3 (2 years)
Career Record: 26-3 (2 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Dan Larson
Defensive Coordinator: Grant Olson • Location: Fargo, N.D.
Stadium: Fargodome (18,700)

ETHAN SCHREIFELS/NDSU ATHLETICS

TELLY JOHNSON JR.

LOREN ORR/GETTY IMAGES)

SCOUTING THE HUSKIES

"That's the state of college football with a lot more coaches [like ex-NIU head coach Thomas Hammock] leaving to take NFL opportunities. The G6 level presents a lot of challenges. I think if you want to just coach football, being a head coach at the G6 level is probably not the best place because you are wearing so many different hats. ... Schematically, they'll have a little adjustment to the Mountain West because there are more spread-out offenses than there are in the MAC. There are some pretty wild elevation places, and that's different. They're coming from a league where most teams want to run the ball, and in the Mountain West, you've got more [pass-first teams]. But they've got good coaches over there, so they'll figure it out and adapt."

— An opposing Mountain West assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)

WR	1	**DEAREE ROGERS (SR.)**	7	Cam Thompson* (Sr.)
WR	13	Kevin Holmes Jr.* (Jr.)	0	La'Don Bryant (So.)
WR	3	Rickey Taylor Jr. (So.)	12	Tavaris Coles* (Jr.)
LT	5	**ROSS LIEGEL (SO.)**	61	Ben Gustafson (So.)
LG	53	Luke Skartvedt (Jr.)	62	Grey Rumohr (So.)
C	63	**LANDON HRON (JR.)**	69	Logan Gross (So.)
RG	55	Ty Mead* (Sr.)	68	Samir Senenat (So.)
RT	66	Lane Mahnesmith (So.)	78	Jacob Welch (Jr.)
TE	83	Jason Fowler (So.)	85	Joe Stein (So.)
QB	2	Brady Davidson (So.)	14	Jalen Macon (Sr.)
RB	45	**TELLY JOHNSON JR. (JR.)**	24	Elijah Porter (So.)

DEFENSE (0)

DE	18	Jay'shon Thomas (Jr.)	19	James Bradley* (Jr.)
DT	92	Jacob McGhee* (Jr.)	50	Matthew Scarlett (Jr.)
DT	11	Amari Washington (Fr.)	0	Montrel Canion (Fr.)
DE	56	Joseph Nnamuchi* (Jr.)	13	Mathias Smith-Davis* (So.)
MLB	8	Cooper Mau* (Jr.)	6	Kimar Nelson (Fr.)
WLB	15	Broderick Windham (Sr.)	25	Brady Kerperin* (So.)
CB	9	Dev'ion Reynolds (So.)	20	Marshall Washington* (Jr.)
CB	5	Yassine Falke* (Jr.)	3	Liam Lindo* (Sr.)
NB	12	Aaron Warren* (Sr.)	17	Avery Jones* (Sr.)
S	7	Justin Harris* (Jr.)	14	Malik Armstrong (Sr.)
S	26	Tyrese Stanley* (Jr.)	16	Kyon Conyers* (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	33	JJ Schlenhardt (Fr.)	KR	9 Dev'ion Reynolds (So.)
P	36	Jake Ference (So.)	PR	1 DeAree Rogers (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

NORTHERN ILLINOIS HUSKIES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 134 | MWC PREDICTION: 10 | 2025 RECORD: 3-9, 2-6 MAC

OFFENSE The Huskies have a choice to make at quarterback that will influence their offensive philosophy, which needs an overhaul after NIU finished 132nd nationally in total offense in 2025. Sophomore Brady Davidson had two starts; senior Jalen Macon closed last season as the starter; and transfer Ean Hamric arrives from Div. II University of Charleston.

Davidson is a traditional pocket passer who averaged 27 passes in his two starts as a true freshman. Macon is a run-first athlete who is explosive with the ball in his hands but did not get the opportunity to throw many passes. And Hamric is a dual-threat who averaged 155 passing yards and 61 rushing yards per game while leading his team to a league title.

The top running back will be Telly Johnson Jr. He averaged 5.7 yards per carry last year, ranking second in the MAC. Included in that was an 80-yard run against Eastern Michigan.

DeAree Rogers (46 receptions, 506 yards) is the No. 1 target in the passing game. Rickey Taylor Jr. is another weapon who missed half of last season due to injury, but he averaged a team-best 14.9 yards per reception.

The offensive line will be young, with center Landon Hron and left tackle Ross Liegel the only experienced starters.

DEFENSE The secondary enters the season as the best position group on the team. Justin Harris and Tyrese Stanley are a couple of junior-college transfers who should comprise a solid safety tandem. Dev'ion Reynolds will man one corner, and transfer Yassine Falke from NAIA Marian was all-conference and is expected to make an impact.

In NIU's 4-2-5 scheme, Broderick Windham is moving from safety to linebacker, and Cooper Mau will try to hold off Kimar Nelson, who came on strong toward the end of his true freshman season and should be a key factor in a defense that finished eighth in the MAC last season.

The defensive line will be counting on Amari Washington and Jacob McGhee, a transfer from Div. II Lincoln (Mo.) University, to step up. Washington, a defensive tackle, made significant progress last year and has coaches excited.

SPECIALISTS Jake Ference is back after sharing punting duties last year and averaging 43.7 yards per kick. Rogers and Reynolds should again handle punt return and kick return duties, respectively.

FINAL ANALYSIS Northern Illinois, which limped through a 3-9 season last year, is moving to the Mountain West Conference and will go through the year with interim head coach Rob Harley after Thomas Hammock left in February to join the Seattle Seahawks staff. With questions at quarterback and youth along both lines, it projects to be a difficult season for the Huskies in their new conference.

2025 RESULTS (3-9, 2-6 MAC)

Aug. 30	Holy Cross	W	19-17
Sept. 5	at Maryland	L	9-20
Sept. 20	at Mississippi State	L	10-38
Sept. 27	San Diego State	L	3-6
Oct. 4	Miami (Ohio)	L	14-25
Oct. 11	at Eastern Michigan	L	10-16
Oct. 18	at Ohio	L	21-48
Oct. 25	Ball State	W	21-7
Nov. 5	at Toledo	L	3-42
Nov. 12	at UMass	W	45-3
Nov. 18	Western Michigan	L	19-35
Nov. 28	Kent State	L	31-35

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	at Iowa
Sept. 12	Illinois State
Sept. 19	at Arizona
Sept. 26	at Georgia State
Oct. 10	Air Force
Oct. 17	at Wyoming
Oct. 24	Hawai'i
Oct. 31	at UNLV
Nov. 7	at San José State
Nov. 14	Nevada
Nov. 21	at North Dakota St.
Nov. 28	UTEP

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Bryshawn Brown, QB	★★★
2.	Ross Ogden, LB	★★★
3.	Braylon Agee, WR	★★★
4.	Deacon King, S	★★★
5.	Asa Johnson, QB	★★★
6.	Jaiduan Cranford, RB	★★★
7.	Jack Murray, LB	★★★
8.	Cian Mahoney, IOL	★★★
9.	Jermaine Green, WR	★★★
10.	Darrius Summers III, EDGE	★★★

**Per Rivals*

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Rob Harley • Record at School: First Season • Career Record: First Season • Offensive Coordinators: Tony Petersen, Quinn Sanders • Defensive Coordinator: Rob Harley • Location: DeKalb, Ill. • Stadium: Huskie Stadium (28,211)

SAN JOSÉ STATE SPARTANS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 116 | MWC PREDICTION: 8 | 2025 RECORD: 3-9, 2-6 MWC

OFFENSE The Spartans were second in the Mountain West in passing offense a year ago but were undone by 17 interceptions. Whoever wins the QB battle between last year's third-stringer Robert McDaniel, Hawai'i transfer Luke Weaver and freshman Daniel Rolovich will need to take better care of the football. McDaniel was the leader during spring practice.

The wide receiver room, which has produced the nation's leader in receiving yardage (Danny Scudero in 2025 and Nick Nash in 2024) in both of head coach Ken Niumatalolo's first two seasons, will be starting from scratch. Malachi Riley, who was slated to start last season before being lost for the season in Week 1 to a lower-body injury, should be the No. 1 pass-catcher. Penn State transfer Anthony Ivey will also be one to watch.

At running back, Jabari Bates returns and will get the bulk of the carries after averaging a team-best 7.1 yards per rush and just under 50 yards per game as a reserve.

The offensive line allowed a league-low 13 sacks a year ago, but only two starters return. Senior center Joseph Harbert could be in line for all-league honors if he continues to develop.

DEFENSE The Spartans are rebuilding on defense. Ethan Powell is back at outside linebacker, and Zane Carter, who was slated to start but missed 2025 due to injury, should be the starter at the other outside 'backer. On the inside, FCS Weber State transfer Aizik Mahuka made a big impression on the coaching staff early in spring.

The defensive line will look to Justin Stearns to lead the way at end. He has six career starts. Nate Lewis is an athletic end who showed signs of development in the spring.

SJSU's allowed the MWC's second-highest passer rating and tied for a league-low seven interceptions. Corner Greco Carrillo would have started but missed 2025 due to injury. Kejuan Bullard Jr. has also worked his way to the top of the depth chart, and FCS Cal Poly transfer safety Brian Dukes Jr. and converted wideout Tuli Tagovailoa-Amosa will be working with new pass game coordinator/cornerbacks coach Brian Norwood.

SPECIALISTS Punter Trent Carrizosa is an all-league candidate after averaging 45.6 yards per kick last season. The placekicking duties will come down to Mathias Brown, who was 4-for-7 on field goals last year, and FCS Idaho State transfer Trajan Sinatra.

FINAL ANALYSIS The Spartans are starting over after a surprising 3-9 season snapped a three-year run of bowl games. There is a wide variance between SJSU's floor and ceiling. There is a recent track record of an elite pass offense, but the defense is full of questions.

2025 RESULTS (3-9, 2-6 MWC)

Aug. 29	Central Michigan	L	14-16
Sept. 6	at Texas	L	7-38
Sept. 20	Idaho	W	31-28
Sept. 27	at Stanford	L	29-30
Oct. 3	New Mexico	W	35-28
Oct. 11	at Wyoming	L	28-35
Oct. 17	at Utah State	L	25-30
Nov. 1	Hawai'i	W	45-38
Nov. 8	Air Force	L	16-26
Nov. 15	at Nevada	L	10-55
Nov. 22	at San Diego State	L	3-25
Nov. 29	Fresno State	L	14-41

2026 SCHEDULE

Aug. 29	at USC
Sept. 4	at Eastern Michigan
Sept. 12	Cal Poly
Sept. 19	Fresno State
Oct. 3	at Hawai'i
Oct. 10	Wyoming
Oct. 17	at UTEP
Oct. 24	at Nevada
Oct. 31	New Mexico
Nov. 7	Northern Illinois
Nov. 14	at Air Force
Nov. 21	UNLV
Nov. 28	North Dakota State

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1. Carson Clark, WR ★★★
2. Devin Olmande, WR ★★★
3. Johnny Notarianni, IOL ★★★
4. Daniel Rolovich, QB ★★★
5. Bronx Letuligasenoa, EDGE ★★★
6. Shane Kiley, TE ★★★
7. Skylar Tiatia, LB ★★★
8. Courshawn Hill, RB ★★★
9. Viliami Lotoaniu, LB ★★★
10. Keenan Parks, IOL ★★★

*Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Ken Niumatalolo • Record at School: 10-15 (2 years) • Career Record: 119-98 (18 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Craig Stutzmann • Defensive Coordinator: Bojay Filimoeatu • Location: San José, Calif. • Stadium: CEFCU Stadium (18,203)

JABARI BATES

SCOUTING THE SPARTANS

"I know they were disappointed with the season they had last year. But that offense is a system, and that offense produces. I know they brought in a new defensive coordinator and some new guys on staff, but [head coach] Ken Niumatalolo is a winner. I would think everyone in the conference would anticipate them being closer to how they were when they went to a bowl game in that first season in 2024. ... I'd be willing to bet that they're gonna have a pretty solid bounce-back year and be a contender, probably more than people outside the conference would think. ... They had [receiver] Danny Scudero last year and the [receiving] triple crown winner, Nick Nash, the year before. They're just great at finding ways to get their playmakers the ball."

— An opposing Mountain West assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (2)

WR	11	Malachi Riley (Jr.)	21	Carson Clark (Fr.)
WR	10	Anthony Ivey* (Sr.)	14	Dominique McKenzie* (So.)
WR	27	Tama Amisone (So.)	13	Cooper Hoch (Jr.)
WR	15	Jerry McClure* (Jr.)	20	Jordan Anderson* (So.)
LT	63	Brian Tapu* (Fr.)	72	Lavaka Taukeiaho* (Sr.)
LG	54	Daniel Moleni (Sr.)	78	David Perez (So.)
C	**75**	**JOSEPH HARBERT (SR.)**	77	Daniel Tuliau (Fr.)
RG	**62**	**TYLER CHEN (JR.)**	71	Makoni Manukainiu (So.)
RT	56	Simeon Afalava (Sr.)	70	Ikiansio Tupou* (So.)
QB	12	Robert McDaniel (Fr.)	3	Luke Weaver* (Sr.)
RB	6	Jabari Bates (Sr.)	34	Viliami Teu (Jr.)

DEFENSE (0)

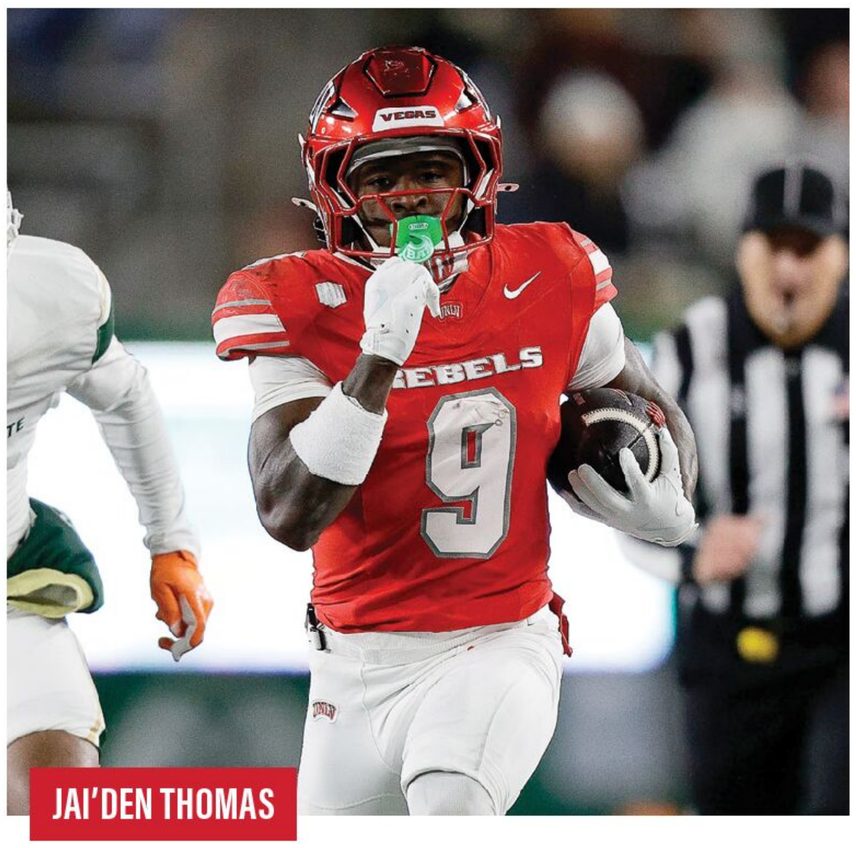
DE	57	Justin Stearns (Sr.)	91	Jeremiah Tuiileila* (Fr.)
DT	51	Solomone Langi (Sr.)	90	Jayland McGlothen* (Jr.)
DT	92	Noa Siaosi (Jr.)	55	Ian Shewell* (Sr.)
DE	99	Nate Lewis (Sr.)	89	Etu Finau (Sr.)
OLB	26	Ethan Powell (Sr.)	18	Dylan Lee (Jr.)
MLB	16	Naseri Danielson (Jr.)	14	Aizik Mahuka* (Jr.)
OLB	25	Zane Carter (Jr.)	24	Malakai Hoeft (Sr.)
CB	5	Kejuan Bullard Jr. (Sr.)	2	Maliki Crawford (Jr.)
CB	12	Greco Carrillo (So.)	23	Isaiah Buxton* (So.)
S	1	Brian Dukes Jr.* (Sr.)	27	Jackson Barton* (So.)
S	39	Tuli Tagovailoa-Amosa (So.)	13	Pierce Walker* (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	99	Mathias Brown (Jr.)	KR	6	Jabari Bates (Sr.)
P	49	Trent Carrizosa (Sr.)	PR	39	Tuli Tagovailoa-Amosa (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

LACHLAN CUNNINGHAM/GETTY IMAGES)



JAI'DEN THOMAS

ISAIAH J. DOWNING-IMAGN IMAGES

SCOUTING THE REBELS

"[Head coach] Dan Mullen still has his fastball. No doubt about it. Their quarterback last year [Anthony Colandrea], he was like [former Vanderbilt QB] Diego Pavia with how he ran around and the off-schedule stuff. It was crazy. It was like he was covered in grease. He was special. It might look a little different [with him transferring to Nebraska], but they're reloading. We're gonna have to learn how to try to defend that in the same way. You've got two guys in [Alex] Orji and [Auburn transfer] Jackson Arnold who were former blue-chip recruits who are battling it out to be the starter. Their running back [Jai'Den Thomas] was the best back in the league last year. He decided to stay for a reason. ... They're gonna be the betting favorites to win the league."

— An opposing Mountain West assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)

WR	16	Kayden McGee (So.)	80	Taz Reddicks* (Jr.)
WR	8	Taeshaun Lyons (Jr.)	17	Amorion Walker* (Sr.)
WR	4	DeAngelo Irvin Jr. (Sr.)	87	Tavian McNair (Fr.)
LT	**72**	**WILL THOMAS (SR.)**	63	Alekai Afoa (Jr.)
LG	77	Colton Thomasson* (Jr.)	65	Ace Robinson (Fr.)
C	**79**	**AUSTIN BOYD (SR.)**	66	BJ Tolo* (Jr.)
RG	55	Griffin Scroggs* (Sr.)	74	Amare Taase (So.)
RT	78	Jackson Brown* (Jr.)	73	Jesus Garcia II (Fr.)
TE	84	Keyan Burnett* (Sr.)	88	Velltray Jefferson (Sr.)
QB	11	Jackson Arnold* (Sr.)	1	Alex Orji (Sr.)
RB	**9**	**JAI'DEN THOMAS (SR.)**	20	Jaylon Glover (Sr.)

DEFENSE (3)

DE	42	Andre Porter (So.)	91	Elias Rudolph (So.)
DT	**94**	**LUCAS CONTI (JR.)**	90	Eliah Logo (Fr.)
DT	16	Mohamed Altayeb (Sr.)	88	Mo Abbasher (Jr.)
DE	18	Landen Thomas (Jr.)	32	Kenji Scanlan (So.)
LB	**15**	**BLESYNG ALUALU-TUIOLEMOTU (JR.)**	30	Dee Crayton* (Sr.)
LB	43	Kamuela Ka'aihue (Sr.)	34	Cam Santee* (Sr.)
CB	2	Denver Harris (Sr.)	25	Jaylen Allen (So.)
CB	5	Quandarius Keyes (Sr.)	6	Mumu Bin-Wahad (Sr.)
NB	22	Kyron Chambers* (Sr.)	20	Landyn Cleveland* (Jr.)
S	**7**	**JAKE POPE (SR.)**	28	Logan Christensen (So.)
S	10	Tre Fulton (So.)	24	Tony-Louis Nkuba* (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	32	Ramon Villela (Jr.)	KR	4 DeAngelo Irvin Jr. (Sr.)
P	4	Matt Choules* (Fr.)	PR	4 DeAngelo Irvin Jr. (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

UNLV REBELS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 59 | MWC PREDICTION: 1 | 2025 RECORD: 10-4, 6-2 MWC

OFFENSE Auburn transfer quarterback Jackson Arnold is hoping that he experiences what Anthony Colandrea did in his one year at UNLV. Colandrea was the Mountain West Offensive Player of the Year in head coach Dan Mullen's first season, and Arnold will try to pick up where Colandrea left off. Arnold has starting experience at Oklahoma and Auburn, but he ultimately lost his job at both schools. If he loses his job at UNLV, former Michigan transfer Alex Orji is the backup as a run-first option.

Jai'Den "Jet" Thomas will be a fourth-year starter after rushing for 1,036 yards and 12 TDs last season. He is the face of the program and will be a candidate for MWC Offensive Player of the Year.

The wide receiver room has no starters returning, but the coaches are excited about sophomore Kayden McGee. He made big plays on special teams last season, scoring the winning TD against Utah State, and he is the team's fastest player. Taeshaun Lyons was productive last season in a reserve role.

All-conference lineman Austin Boyd is moving from tackle to center, and starting left tackle Will Thomas also returns.

DEFENSE One starter returns at each level for a defense that ranked 89th in the nation in scoring. Blesyng Alualu-Tuiolemotu emerged late last season at linebacker and will be a cornerstone. Linebacker transfer Cam Santee was the CAA Defensive Player of the Year at FCS Holy Cross last year and will be in the rotation with starter Kamuela Ka'aihue.

Up front, junior Lucas Conti returns for his fourth season and will anchor the line. Andre Porter and Landen Thomas will move into more prominent roles on the ends.

In the secondary, Jake Pope spent two years at Alabama and one at Georgia before starting all 14 games last year for UNLV. He will be the leader of a much-improved backline. Kyron Chambers arrives from SMU and Tony Louis-Nkuba from Arizona State to bolster the unit.

SPECIALISTS Kicker Ramon Villela hit 15-of-20 field-goal attempts and was 4-for-7 beyond 40 yards. He had a game-winner against Miami (Ohio) and forced OT vs. Utah State with another made field goal late. Australian Matt Choules will handle the punting chores.

FINAL ANALYSIS Five of UNLV's 11 losses since 2023 have come to Boise State, including three in the Mountain West Championship Game. That obstacle is gone with the Broncos' departure to the Pac-12. Can the Rebels win the conference? That will be on the shoulders of Arnold as well as the defense, which surrendered at least 38 points five times last year.

2025 RESULTS (10-4, 6-2 MWC)

Aug. 23	Idaho State	W	38-31
Aug. 29	at Sam Houston	W	38-21
Sept. 6	UCLA	W	30-23
Sept. 20	at Miami (Ohio)	W	41-38
Oct. 4	at Wyoming	W	31-17
Oct. 11	Air Force	W	51-48
Oct. 18	at Boise State	L	31-56
Nov. 1	New Mexico	L	35-40
Nov. 8	at Colorado State	W	42-10
Nov. 15	Utah State (ot)	W	29-26
Nov. 21	Hawai'i	W	38-10
Nov. 29	at Nevada	W	42-17
Dec. 5	at Boise State #	L	21-38
Dec. 23	vs. Ohio %	L	10-17

#MW Championship %Frisco Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Aug. 29	Memphis
Sept. 5	at Hawai'i
Sept. 12	at North Texas
Sept. 26	at Akron
Oct. 3	Cal
Oct. 10	North Dakota State
Oct. 17	at Air Force
Oct. 31	Northern Illinois
Nov. 7	Wyoming
Nov. 14	at New Mexico
Nov. 21	at San José State
Nov. 28	Nevada

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Jordan Njoku, LB	★★★
2.	Jesse Harden, WR	★★★
3.	Jesus Garcia II, OT	★★★
4.	Aveon Williams, ATH	★★★
5.	Demari Nunley, WR	★★★
6.	Tatum Bell Jr., WR	★★★
7.	Derek Garcia, QB	★★★
8.	Tylen Mathews, CB	★★★
9.	Eli Sanchez, IOL	★★★
10.	Poe Purcell, DL	★★★

*Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Dan Mullen • Record at School: 10-4 (1 year)
Career Record: 113-65 (14 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Corey Dennis
Defensive Coordinator: Paul Guenther • Location: Las Vegas, Nev.
Stadium: Allegiant Stadium (65,000)

UTEP MINERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 130 | MWC PREDICTION: 9 | 2025 RECORD: 2-10, 1-7 CUSA

OFFENSE UTEP is bringing in EJ Colson, the latest touted FCS Incarnate Word quarterback, to revitalize an offense that finished 112th in the FBS in total yards a year ago. Colson, who has three years of eligibility left, threw for 2,142 yards and 16 touchdowns in 10 games last season. UIW went 3-6 in Colson's nine starts. He averaged almost 12 carries per game as a starter and ran for three touchdowns, so the Miners will look to tap into his dual-threat ability.

Missouri transfer running back Tavorus Jones saw limited action with the Tigers for three years, but he showed the ability not only to run between the tackles but also to catch passes out of the backfield. He should be RB1 with help behind him from Buffalo transfer Lamar Sperling and sophomore Elijah McCoy.

Wide receiver Jaylan Brown redshirted last season at Michigan State and will be looked to as a primary downfield target. FCS Northern Colorado transfer Carver Cheeks turned some heads in the spring as well.

The offensive line will start four transfers along with right tackle Juan Camacho Jr., a native of El Paso.

DEFENSE The secondary will be the strength of a defense that was No. 110 nationally in points allowed a year ago. Safety Xavier Smith is the leader of the backline and had 60 tackles and an interception last season. Corner Justin Content is another trusted veteran.

Linebacker Jayden Wilson was UTEP's second-leading tackler last year with 92, including eight for a loss, and should be an all-league candidate. El Paso native Shay Smith (6-foot-2, 215) is moving from QB to linebacker and will be a factor.

On the defensive line, Ashton Coker returns as a starter inside, and the athletic Derek Burns is expected to provide a spark after missing last season with an injury.

SPECIALISTS Transfer Cade Hechter should be taking over the placekicking duties after transferring from UT Martin, where he was a second-team FCS All-American after hitting 15-of-17 field goals. Brady Braun is a 245-pound punter from FCS Gardner-Webb. Athletic Kam Thomas should be the primary punt returner.

FINAL ANALYSIS Head coach Scotty Walden enters his third season having won only five games at UTEP. With the Miners stepping up from Conference USA to the Mountain West, things will not get any easier. Oklahoma and Michigan await in September. The hope is that Colson is the real deal at QB and that his weapons pan out. The defense has a lot of questions, which is not what you want against this schedule.

2025 RESULTS (2-10, 1-7 CUSA)

Aug. 30	at Utah State	L	16-28
Sept. 6	Tennessee-Martin	W	42-17
Sept. 13	at Texas	L	10-27
Sept. 20	ULM	L	25-31
Sept. 27	Louisiana Tech	L	11-30
Oct. 8	Liberty	L	8-19
Oct. 15	at Sam Houston	W	35-17
Oct. 28	at Kennesaw State	L	20-33
Nov. 8	Jacksonville State	L	27-30
Nov. 15	at Missouri State	L	24-38
Nov. 22	New Mexico State	L	31-34
Nov. 29	at Delaware	L	31-61

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	at Oklahoma
Sept. 12	Texas Southern
Sept. 19	at Michigan
Sept. 26	Oregon State
Oct. 3	at New Mexico
Oct. 10	Nevada
Oct. 17	San José State
Oct. 31	at North Dakota St.
Nov. 7	Hawai'i
Nov. 14	Wyoming
Nov. 21	at Air Force
Nov. 28	at Northern Illinois

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Colt Matlock, S	★★★
2.	Tylen Hockett, CB	★★★
3.	Decorian Thompson, CB	★★★
4.	JD Wallace, ATH	★★★
5.	Caynan James, DL	★★★
6.	DAdrian Tinney-Anderson, IOL	★★★
7.	Eddie Lartigue Jr., IOL	★★★
8.	Kane White-Tinsley, S	★★★
9.	Adarius Hutchinson, S	★★★
10.	Bodey Weaver, QB	★★★

*Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Scotty Walden • Record at School: 5-19 (2 years) • Career Record: 39-39 (8 years) • Offensive Coordinators: Joe Pappalardo, Lanear Sampson • Defensive Coordinators: Kyle Beyer, Kelvin Sigler • Location: El Paso, Texas • Stadium: Sun Bowl (45,971)

KAM THOMAS

SCOUTING THE MINERS

"The [QB] Malachi Nelson situation that played out there last year, there's always a risk in getting the quarterback at your place because they know that they can start. But if you look at the quarterbacks who start off at a high level of college football and transfer down, there are not a lot of success stories. Very few. It was the same thing for him at Boise State. I would imagine there was something where he didn't feel like he was getting the support he needed, and he checked out. [Head coach] Scotty Walden is doing a good job there, but they have had a hard time getting a quarterback in place to make his offense go. If they can do that, they'll have a good year. If not, they'll have a rough year."

— *An opposing Mountain West assistant coach*

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (0)

WR	7	Jaylan Brown* (So.)	81	Jeremiah Nash* (Jr.)
WR	5	Carver Cheeks* (Sr.)	24	CJ Simon (Fr.)
WR	80	Marcus Torres (So.)	13	Nik Henry (So.)
LT	54	Jaymon Lamb* (Jr.)	70	Maddox Huber (Fr.)
LG	56	Brian Williams Jr.* (So.)	76	Diego De La Cruz (Fr.)
C	67	Jayden Trapp* (So.)	57	Craig Wydra (So.)
RG	55	Omoruyi Aliu-Otokiti* (Jr.)	71	Preston Perkins (Fr.)
RT	75	Juan Camacho Jr. (Sr.)	73	Tyler Roberts (Fr.)
TE	86	Jordan Andrus (Fr.)	87	Chance Bell* (Jr.)
QB	1	EJ Colson* (So.)	12	Raymond Moore III* (So.)
RB	0	Tavorus Jones* (Jr.)	32	Lamar Sperling* (Jr.)

DEFENSE (4)

DE	3	Shakaun Bowser (Sr.)	44	Oryend Fisher* (Jr.)
DL	99	Elijah Fields* (Sr.)	94	Jimmy Leon (Fr.)
DT	**90**	**ASHTON COKER (JR.)**	98	Preston Hickey* (Sr.)
DE	11	Derek Burns (Jr.)	25	Royce Wilson (Fr.)
SLB	13	Isaiah Bogerty* (Sr.)	41	Vashon Brunswick II (So.)
MLB	**10**	**JAYDEN WILSON (SR.)**	8	Shay Smith (So.)
CB	5	TJ Tillman (So.)	28	Erion Wilkins (So.)
CB	**0**	**JUSTIN CONTENT (JR.)**	23	Kaleb Miles* (Jr.)
S	15	Donavan Howard* (Sr.)	16	Esteban Guillory* (Sr.)
S	**2**	**XAVIER SMITH (SR.)**	17	Darnell Williams (So.)
S	7	Kode Lowe* (Sr.)	30	Allen Gant (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	48	Cade Hechter* (Sr.)	KR	8	Kam Thomas (Sr.)
P	47	Brady Braun* (Sr.)	PR	8	Kam Thomas (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

GABY VELASQUEZ/ EL PASO TIMES

SAMUEL "TOTE" HARRIS

SCOUTING THE COWBOYS

"Last year, it was just trying to find their rhythm on offense, but they played in a lot of close games. When you play Wyoming, you know that they're gonna try to slow the game down. They have a system that they want to run. Your guys are gonna be sore the day after you play them. Like, some of their linebackers are still 240 pounds. They're gonna hit ya. They've got an offensive lineman who is gonna be a Day 2 pick in the NFL Draft. They still have massive guys on the offensive line. I think they'll bounce back just fine. ... Their new OC [Christian Taylor] is coming from the Buffalo Bills, so you know that he's gonna have some schematic things ready. I don't know exactly what they're gonna do, but I'm sure that it'll involve running the ball."

— An opposing Mountain West assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)

WR	**2**	**ERIC RICHARDSON (SR.)**	5	Justin Popovich* (Sr.)
WR	3	Deion DeBlanc (So.)	13	Pierre "PJ" Jackson (Fr.)
WR	9	Jackson Holman (Jr.)	12	Bricen Brantley (Jr.)
LT	**70**	**REX JOHNSEN (SR.)**	77	Josiah Petaia (Jr.)
LG	52	Chandler Donaway* (Sr.)	76	Quinn Grovesteen-Matchey (Jr.)
C	51	Jason Maciejczak* (Jr.)	66	Johnathan Bush (Fr.)
RG	50	Giovanni Panozzo (So.)	73	Caleb Hall (So.)
RT	**63**	**BRAYLON JENKINS (SO.)**	75	Cooper Lawson (Fr.)
TE	89	Jake Wilson (Jr.)	83	Kyle Frendt (So.)
QB	6	Tyler Hughes* (Sr.)	7	Mason Drube (Fr.)
RB	**26**	**SAMUEL "TOTE" HARRIS (SO.)**	8	Markell Holman* (Sr.)

DEFENSE (2)

DE	21	Jack Dunkley (Sr.)	58	Jordan Turnbull (Jr.)
DT	92	Dante Drake (Jr.)	95	Caleb Robinson (Sr.)
DT	98	Jayden Williams (Jr.)	44	Ja'Quan Redfern* (Jr.)
DE	11	Esaia Bogar (Sr.)	99	Donnie Wingate (Sr.)
MLB	42	Ethan Stuhlsatz (Sr.)	2	Anthony Beavers* (Sr.)
OLB	26	Gary Rutherford (So.)	16	Karson Butts (So.)
CB	0	Tyson Shamsid-Deen (So.)	15	David Leonard (So.)
CB	8	Logan Mackey* (Jr.)	3	Ian Bell (Jr.)
NB	**12**	**DESMAN HEARNS (SR.)**	9	Travis Franklin Jr.* (Sr.)
S	**23**	**JONES THOMAS (JR.)**	4	Jett Vincent* (Jr.)
S	5	Brooklyn Cheek (So.)	6	Kaiden Kimble-Turner (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	47	Erik Sandvik (Jr.)	**KR**	3 Deion DeBlanc (So.)
P	18	Bart Edmiston (Sr.)	**PR**	3 Deion DeBlanc (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

ISAIAH J. DOWNING-IMAGN IMAGES

WYOMING COWBOYS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 110 | MWC PREDICTION: 6 | 2025 RECORD: 4-8, 2-6 MWC

OFFENSE If there is reason for optimism for a Cowboys offense that averaged only 16 points per game last year, it starts at quarterback. Wyoming welcomes Tyler Hughes from FCS William & Mary, where he threw for 2,330 yards and 20 touchdowns and ran for 670 yards and 11 scores. Hughes worked with new offensive coordinator Christian Taylor at W&M before Taylor left for the NFL. The two are reunited in Laramie.

Running back Samuel "Tote" Harris is back after leading the team in rushing as a true freshman with 558 yards and 5.6 yards per carry. FCS Western Illinois transfer Markell Holman, who led the Ohio Valley Conference in rushing last season with 1,063 yards, will spell him.

Deion DeBlanc is a slot receiver who is also a dynamic return specialist and will be the leader of a young group. Eric Richardson saw some spot duty, while Jackson Holman battled injuries.

Wyoming traditionally has featured the tight end, and there are two good ones on hand in Jake Wilson and Kyle Frendt.

The offensive line returns both starting tackles, and the coaches are excited about Nebraska transfer center Jason Maciejczak.

DEFENSE Ethan Stuhlsatz takes over at middle linebacker and had a very strong spring both physically and in his leadership role of lining up the defense. Wyoming will count on him to lead a unit that finished fifth in the Mountain West Conference in total defense. Gary Rutherford will join him as the linebacker group turns over. USC transfer Anthony Beavers is also one to watch.

In the secondary, safety Jones Thomas is the leading returning tackler and one of two returning starters on the backline. He had two interceptions and four pass breakups a year ago and will be a candidate for all-league honors. Nickel Desman Hearns is the other returning starter.

Up front, defensive tackle Dante Drake returns after missing all of 2025 with an Achilles injury. He should be the top player on the line, along with veteran Jayden Williams.

SPECIALISTS Both punter Bart Edmiston and placekicker Erik Sandvik return, with Edmiston a candidate for all-league honors after he averaged 46.1 yards per kick a year ago. DeBlanc averaged 16.7 yards per punt return and took one back for a touchdown.

FINAL ANALYSIS The necessary offensive turnaround will depend on Hughes at quarterback, and the arrow was pointing up in spring ball. The defense will have a lot of new faces, but it looks strong up the middle at all three levels and will have a chance to keep Wyoming in games. Head coach Jay Sawvel's first bowl appearance in his third season is a possibility in a weakened MWC.

2025 RESULTS (4-8, 2-6 MWC)

Aug. 28	at Akron	W	10-0
Sept. 6	Northern Iowa	W	31-7
Sept. 13	Utah	L	6-31
Sept. 20	at Colorado	L	20-37
Oct. 4	UNLV	L	17-31
Oct. 11	San José State	W	35-28
Oct. 18	at Air Force	L	21-24
Oct. 25	Colorado State	W	28-0
Nov. 1	at San Diego State	L	7-24
Nov. 15	at Fresno State	L	3-24
Nov. 22	Nevada	L	7-13
Nov. 29	at Hawai'i	L	7-27

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	at Colorado State
Sept. 12	Northern Colorado
Sept. 19	at Central Michigan
Sept. 26	Hawai'i
Oct. 3	at North Dakota St.
Oct. 10	at San José State
Oct. 17	Northern Illinois
Oct. 24	Air Force
Nov. 7	at UNLV
Nov. 14	at UTEP
Nov. 21	New Mexico
Nov. 28	UConn

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Colin Ford, TE	★★★
2.	Pierce Decker, OT	★★★
3.	Jonathan Pearcy, IOL	★★★
4.	Jackson Garrett, IOL	★★★
5.	Karson Butts, LB	★★★
6.	Jordan Styles, WR	★★★
7.	Taylor Hasselbeck, QB	★★★
8.	Beck Haswell, ATH	★★★
9.	Therman Williams, CB	★★★
10.	Mason Wright, EDGE	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Jay Sawvel • Record at School: 7-17 (2 years) • Career Record: 7-17 (2 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Christian Taylor • Defensive Coordinator: Aaron Bohl • Location: Laramie, Wyo. • Stadium: War Memorial Stadium (29,811)

PAC-12 PREVIEW

MADDUX MADSEN AND DYLAN RILEY, BOISE STATE

PREDICTED ORDER OF FINISH

1. **BOISE STATE** BRONCOS
2. **SAN DIEGO STATE** AZTECS
3. **FRESNO STATE** BULLDOGS
4. **WASHINGTON STATE** COUGARS
5. **UTAH STATE** AGGIES
6. **TEXAS STATE** BOBCATS
7. **COLORADO STATE** RAMS
8. **OREGON STATE** BEAVERS

PAC-12 CHAMPIONSHIP

BOISE ST. OVER SAN DIEGO ST.

ALL-PAC-12 TEAM

FIRST-TEAM OFFENSE

QB	MADDUX MADSEN	Boise State
RB	LUCKY SUTTON	San Diego State
RB	DYLAN RILEY	Boise State
AP	SIRE GAINES	Boise State
WR	JORDAN NAPIER	San Diego State
WR	CHRIS DAWN JR.	Texas State
WR	BEAU SPARKS	Texas State
TE	JUICE VEREEN	Colorado State
C	JIMMY LISTON	Utah State
OL	ROGER CARREON	Boise State
OL	JOSEPH BORJON	San Diego State
OL	ASHTON TRIPP	Washington State
OL	BRAYDEN WALTON	Fresno State

FIRST-TEAM DEFENSE

DL	JAYDEN VIRGIN-MORGAN	Boise State
DL	MAX STEGE	Boise State
DL	DEIJON LAFFITTE	Fresno State
DL	TYREE MORRIS	Utah State
LB	TANO LETULI	San Diego State
LB	BRONSON OLEVAO JR.	Utah State
LB	AIDEN SULLIVAN	Oregon State
LB	BOEN PHELPS	Boise State
CB	SIMEON HARRIS	Fresno State
CB	JADEN MICKEY	Boise State
S	DALESEAN STALEY	San Diego State
S	BREVIN HAMBLIN	Utah State

FIRST-TEAM SPECIALISTS

K	COLTON BOOMER	Boise State
P	OSCAR DOYLE	Boise State
KR	JAYLEN JENKINS	Texas State
PR	TONY FREEMAN	Washington State

BOWL PROJECTIONS

Poinsettia: San Diego State vs. UNLV

Xbox: Utah State vs. Old Dominion

Puerto Rico: Fresno State vs. South Florida

First Responder: Washington State vs. Cal

College Football Playoff First Round: Boise State vs. Indiana

JOIN COLLEGE FOOTBALL EXPERT STEVEN LASSAN AT ATHLONSPORTS.COM FOR A LOOK AT SECOND- AND THIRD-TEAM SELECTIONS

ISAIAH J. DOWNING-IMAGN IMAGES

COORDINATOR CAROUSEL

BOISE STATE
Offense: New: Nate Potter, Zak Hill
Old: Nate Potter
Defense: New: Terence Brown, Erik Chinander; Old: Erik Chinander

COLORADO STATE
Offense: New: Pryce Tracy
Old: Matt Mumme, Bill Best
Defense: New: Tyson Summers, Kenny McClendon; Old: Tyson Summers

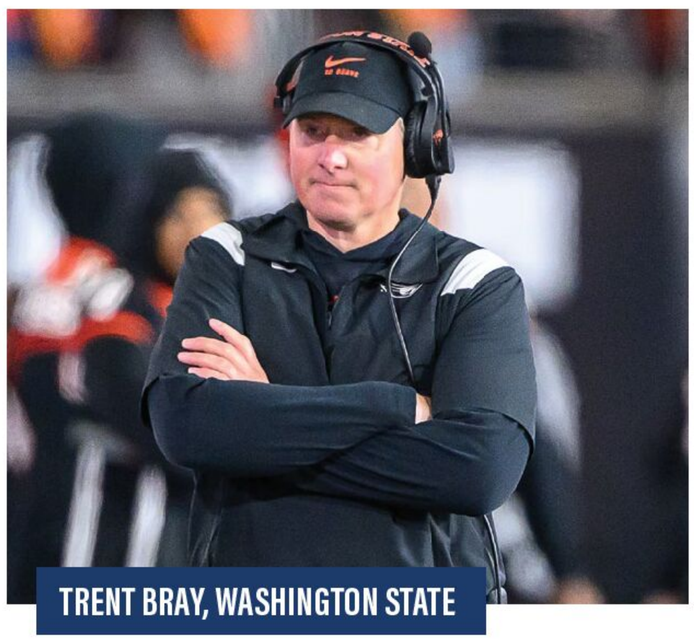
OREGON STATE
Offense: New: Mitch Dahlen, Ryan Wallace; Old: Ryan Gunderson
Defense: New: Mike MacIntyre, Cort Dennison; Old: Rod Chance and Ilaisa Tuiaki

SAN DIEGO STATE
Defense: New: Demetrius Sumler
Old: Rob Aurich

TEXAS STATE
Offense: New: Landon Keopple, Jordan Shoemaker; Old: Landon Keopple
Defense: New: Will Windham, Matthew Gregg; Old: Dexter McCoil Sr., Bradley Dale Peveto

UTAH STATE
Offense: New: Robert Anae
Old: Kevin McGiven

WASHINGTON STATE
Offense: New: Matt Miller
Old: Danny Freund
Defense: New: Trent Bray
Old: Jesse Bobbit



TRENT BRAY, WASHINGTON STATE

BEAU SPARKS, TEXAS STATE
TANO LETULI, SAN DIEGO STATE

FROM LEFT: CRAIG STROBECK-IMAGN IMAGES; MATT BUSH/SPECIAL TO THE CLARION; DAVID FRERKER-IMAGN IMAGES

TOP TRANSFERS

	NAME	POS.	SCHOOL	FORMER SCHOOL
1.	**Caden Pinnick**	QB	Washington State	UC Davis
	Pinnick's passing efficiency earned him FCS All-America honors.			
2.	**McCae Hillstead**	QB	Utah State	BYU
	Hillstead flashed for the Aggies across four starts back in 2023.			
3.	**Hauss Hejny**	QB	Colorado State	Oklahoma State
	Hejny is a former blue-chip recruit who showed promise for the Cowboys.			
4.	**Roman Tillmon**	S	Boise State	South Dakota
	Tillmon fills an area of need, and he's a willing and capable tackler.			
5.	**JeRico Washington Jr.**	CB	Boise State	Kennesaw State
	Washington is a playmaker who forced 10 turnovers for the Owls.			
6.	**Antonio Bluiett**	DB	Utah State	North Dakota
	FCS All-American brings ample experience to the Aggies' secondary.			
7.	**Khristian Martin**	QB	Fresno State	Maryland
	Martin's arm strength and mobility should open up the Bulldogs' offense.			
8.	**Harrison Taggart**	LB	Utah State	Cal
	Taggart brings Power 4 experience to the heart of the Aggies' defense.			
9.	**Xayvion Noland**	WR	Oregon State	UTRGV
	Noland stretched the field in the FCS, averaging 21 yards per catch in '25.			
10.	**Juice Vereen**	TE	Colorado State	UConn
	Vereen broke out as a big-play threat for the Huskies last season.			

RECRUITING RANKINGS BY SCHOOL

1. Boise State (53)
2. Fresno State (68)
3. Colorado State (72)
4. Texas State (76)
5. San Diego State (86)
6. Utah State (87)
7. Oregon State (109)
8. Washington State (131)

Rankings per Rivals; National ranking in parentheses

GAMES TO WATCH

Sept. 5 Boise State at Oregon
Sept. 5 Washington State at Washington
Sept. 5 Wyoming at Colorado State
Sept. 12 Memphis at Boise State
Sept. 19 Utah State at Utah
Sept. 19 James Madison at San Diego St.
Oct. 10 Boise State at Fresno State
Oct. 17 Fresno State at San Diego St.
Oct. 17 Washington State at Oregon St.
Nov. 7 Fresno State at Utah State
Nov. 14 Fresno State at Texas State
Nov. 21 San Diego State at Boise State

TOP 10 RECRUITS

	NAME	POS.	SCHOOL	RATING	NAT. RANK
1.	Terrious Favors	WR	Boise State	★★★	447
2.	La'Keyleon Graves	ATH	Texas State	★★★	613
3.	Xavier Warren	WR	Texas State	★★★	686
4.	Kole Cronin	OT	Boise State	★★★	700
5.	Cynai Thomas	WR	Oregon State	★★★	726
6.	Cullen Thompson	EDGE	Texas State	★★★	753
7.	Jameson Powell	WR	Oregon State	★★★	768
8.	Isaiah Lucero	CB	Fresno State	★★★	807
9.	Derek Stevenson	WR	San Diego State	★★★	819
10.	Keilan Chavies	RB	Boise State	★★★	841

Rankings per Rivals industry ranking

BOISE STATE BRONCOS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 24 | PAC-12 PREDICTION: 1 | 2025 RECORD: 9-5, 6-2 MWC

OFFENSE Redshirt senior quarterback Maddux Madsen is heading into his third season as Boise State's starter, and he'll be working with a relatively fresh-faced receiving corps and offensive line.

The Broncos lost their top four pass-catchers from 2025. However, junior wide receiver Cameron Bates offers both a vertical threat and speed on end-around plays and is expected to step up in 2026. He'll be assisted by 6-foot-5 tight end Matt Wagner, who has proven to have safe hands over the past two years, recording 34 catches for 359 yards in 27 games.

Boise State returns its two leading running backs in junior Dylan Riley and redshirt sophomore Sire Gaines. The pair combined for 1,977 rushing yards in 2025 and should split the carries in 2026.

DEFENSE The Broncos lost nearly their entire secondary from last season, but former Notre Dame transfer Jaden Mickey is expected to lead the defense at the cornerback and nickel spots in his second year with the program.

The Broncos are also in search of a new linebacker group. Redshirt junior Boen Phelps offers great speed and coverage at the position, but tackling could remain an issue — missed tackles at both the first and second levels proved costly in 2025.

Sack production dropped from 55 in 2024 to 27 in 2025, but that stat will likely jump back up in 2026. The Broncos return upperclassman edge rushers Max Stege and Jayden Virgin-Morgan, the latter of whom led Boise State last season in tackles for a loss (13) and sacks (six).

SPECIALISTS Special teams were a sore point for Boise State last year; however, the Broncos will have consistency with the return of place-kicker Colton Boomer and punter Oscar Doyle. Boomer hit all three of his attempts from 50-plus yards and has been bullish about his accuracy improvements. The main issue in 2025 was a lack of explosiveness in the return game. Speedy receivers Bates, Quinton Brown and Terrious Favors are among the favorites to handle punt and kickoff returns.

FINAL ANALYSIS Boise State enters the reborn Pac-12 as the rightful favorite, but the question is, how far can the Broncos go? Madsen has proven his capabilities against Group of 6 opponents, but he has gone 0-4 against Power 4 opponents. Breaking that streak against either Oregon in Week 1 or in the postseason would go a long way for the Broncos.

If Boise State can consistently get its run game going to help open the pass game for an experienced QB, an inaugural Pac-12 title and a shot at the College Football Playoff are certainly on the table in 2026.

2025 RESULTS (9-5, 6-2 MWC)

Aug. 28	at South Florida	L	7-34
Sept. 5	Eastern Washington	W	51-14
Sept. 20	at Air Force	W	49-37
Sept. 27	Appalachian State	W	47-14
Oct. 4	at Notre Dame	L	7-28
Oct. 11	New Mexico	W	41-25
Oct. 18	UNLV	W	56-31
Oct. 24	at Nevada	W	24-3
Nov. 1	Fresno State	L	7-30
Nov. 15	at San Diego State	L	7-17
Nov. 22	Colorado State	W	49-21
Nov. 28	at Utah State	W	25-24
Dec. 5	UNLV #	W	38-21
Dec. 13	vs. Washington %	L	10-38

#MW Championship %LA Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	at Oregon
Sept. 12	Memphis
Sept. 19	South Dakota
Sept. 26	at W. Michigan
Oct. 3	Utah State
Oct. 10	at Fresno State
Oct. 24	at Washington St.
Oct. 31	Texas State
Nov. 7	at Colorado State
Nov. 14	Oregon State
Nov. 21	San Diego State
Nov. 28	at Utah State #

#Projected Flex Opponent

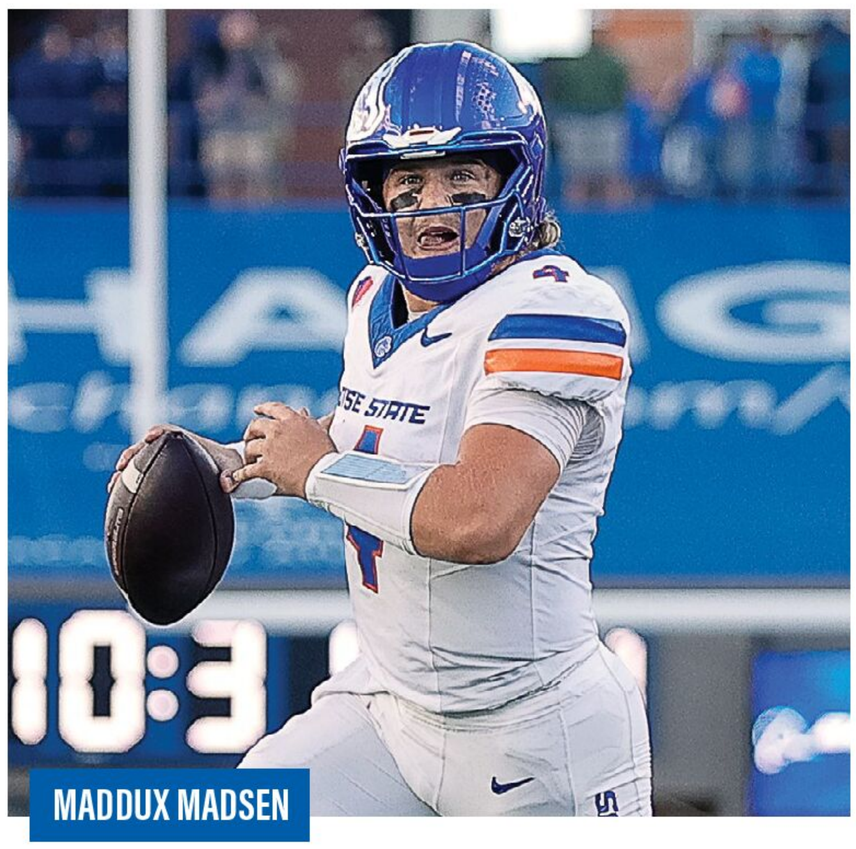
TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Davin Hill, CB	★★★
2.	Terrious Favors, WR	★★★
3.	Rasean Jones, WR	★★★
4.	Akeem Wright, WR	★★★
5.	Keilan Chavies, RB	★★★
6.	Keawe Browne, TE	★★★
7.	Paz St John, DL	★★★
8.	Adam Auston, LB	★★★
9.	Jackson Taylor, QB	★★★
10.	Ryan Brekke, TE	★★★

*Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Spencer Danielson • Record at School: 24-8 (2+ years)
Career Record: 24-8 (2+ years) • Offensive Coordinators: Nate Potter, Zak Hill
Defensive Coordinators: Terence Brown, Erik Chinander • Location: Boise, Idaho • Stadium: Albertsons Stadium (36,387)



MADDUX MADSEN

SCOUTING THE BRONCOS

"Their record over the last couple years speaks for itself as far as being the team to watch in the Pac-12. I probably study them the most out of all the teams in the conference. I'm really curious to see how they play up front on both sides of the ball because I know that they lost a couple of players there. Their quarterback [Maddux Madsen] got experience that only helped him last year. I'm sure he'll be a lot better this year than he was last year, and so will their passing game as a whole. ... They're super athletic from sideline to sideline. They're gonna be really good. I just think that continuity at the quarterback position and in the passing game is gonna be massive for them. I'm just curious to see how they play up front."

— An opposing Pac-12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (7)

WR	13	Darren Morris* (Sr.)	19	Rasean Jones (Fr.)
WR	**80**	**CAMERON BATES (JR.)**	85	Terrious Favors (Fr.)
WR	82	Ben Ford (Sr.)	21	Akeem Wright* (Sr.)
LT	70	Kyle Cox (Jr.)	78	Tyler Ethridge* (Sr.)
LG	64	Carson Rasmussen (Jr.)	52	Stewart Taufa (Fr.)
C	**67**	**JASON STEELE (JR.)**	69	Zander Esty* (Jr.)
RG	**62**	**ROGER CARREON (SR.)**	68	Jake Steele (Sr.)
RT	**75**	**DAYLON METOYER (SR.)**	66	Jacob Tracy (Fr.)
TE	**88**	**MATT WAGNER (JR.)**	86	Austin Terry (Sr.)
QB	**4**	**MADDUX MADSEN (SR.)**	10	Cash Herrera (Fr.)
RB	**24**	**DYLAN RILEY (JR.)**	26	Sire Gaines (So.)

DEFENSE (4)

DE	**95**	**MAX STEGE (SR.)**	51	Roman Caywood (So.)
NT	92	David Latu (Sr.)	96	Lopez Sanusi (So.)
DT	99	Michael Madrie (Jr.)	97	Mikaio Edward* (Jr.)
EDGE	**5**	**JAYDEN VIRGIN-MORGAN (SR.)**	91	Bol Bol (So.)
ILB	43	Jake Ripp (Sr.)	44	Syncere Brackett-Lambey (So.)
OLB	**1**	**BOEN PHELPS (JR.)**	17	Logan Brantley (Jr.)
CB	8	Sherrod Smith (Jr.)	16	Franklyn Johnson Jr. (Jr.)
CB	14	Demetrius Freeney Jr. (Sr.)	15	JeRico Washington Jr.* (Jr.)
NB	7	Jaden Mickey (Sr.)	38	Travis Anderson (So.)
S	**10**	**DEREK GANTER JR. (JR.)**	20	Kyle Hall* (Jr.)
S	22	Roman Tillmon* (Jr.)	33	Josiah Alanis (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	35	Colton Boomer (Sr.)	KR	80 Cameron Bates (Jr.)
P	37	Oscar Doyle (Sr.)	PR	25 Quinton Brown (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

ISAIAH J. DOWNING-IMAGN IMAGES

TOMMY MAHER

ISAIAH J. DOWNING-IMAGN IMAGES

SCOUTING THE RAMS

"[Former UConn head coach] Jim L. Mora was a great hire. He's an excellent coach. He's done it on every level, and I think he'll do a great job of building Colorado State into an excellent team. There's no doubt in my mind that he can do that. ... They're such an unknown in our league. Normally when guys follow from one staff to another — like Iowa State to Penn State, or Curt Cignetti with JMU to Indiana — you can get a sense of what those teams are gonna be. But UConn was an independent who played everybody. They were a good team with a lot of Northeast guys. I don't get the sense that it's just going to automatically follow with them playing the exact same way."

— An opposing Pac-12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (1)

WR	9	Jordan Mosley* (Sr.)	0	RJ Vick* (Sr.)
WR	15	Terrence Smith Jr.* (So.)	4	Lavon Brown (Jr.)
WR	**10**	**TOMMY MAHER (JR.)**	6	Jackson Harper* (Jr.)
LT	76	Toriyan Johnson* (Jr.)	63	John Holthaus (So.)
LG	61	Diego Rodriguez* (So.)	74	Payton Stewart* (So.)
C	65	Phillip Ocon (So.)	73	Braden Hales (So.)
RG	50	Jayden Tuia* (So.)	70	Berlin Lillard (So.)
RT	54	Quinton Harris* (Sr.)	71	Zach Smith (So.)
TE	5	Juice Vereen* (Jr.)	30	Dominic Toy* (So.)
QB	8	Hauss Hejny* (Fr.)	2	K'saan Farrar* (Fr.)
RB	1	Mel Brown* (Sr.)	11	Durell Robinson* (Jr.)

DEFENSE (4)

DL	95	Gabe Jones (Jr.)	94	Alton Tarber IV (Sr.)
DL	93	Robby Harrison* (Sr.)	97	Amare Bell (Fr.)
DL	96	Brandon Kelley* (Jr.)	**77**	**JACK MORAN (SO.)**
DL	**92**	**MUKENDI WA-KALONJI (SR.)**	52	Cleto Chol* (Jr.)
LB	2	Oumar Diomande* (Jr.)	**56**	**KENYON AGURS (JR.)**
LB	23	Jaseim Mitchell (Sr.)	27	Jaylen King (Fr.)
LB	8	Antarron Turner* (Sr.)	28	Marc Pretto* (Sr.)
CB	0	Caleb Presley* (Jr.)	1	Richard Mosley III* (Jr.)
CB	17	CJ Blocker (Jr.)	4	Dylan Phelps (Jr.)
S	13	Elijah Mc-Cantos* (Sr.)	**12**	**JACE BELLAH (SR.)**
S	15	Tre'Shawn Moore* (Jr.)	18	AJ Noland (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	40	Kali Nguma* (Jr.)	KR	1 Mel Brown* (Sr.)
P	99	Cavan Craig* (So.)	PR	15 Terrence Smith Jr.* (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

COLORADO STATE RAMS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 97 | PAC-12 PREDICTION: 7 | 2025 RECORD: 2-10, 1-7 MWC

OFFENSE Offensive coordinator Pryce Tracy, former UConn passing game coordinator and quarterbacks coach, gets his first chance as a play-caller, as he hopes to bring the explosive 2025 UConn offense to Colorado State. The Rams plan to be a dangerous outside-zone run team with a lot of good backs. Tight ends will be a feature in the pass game.

The biggest question is at quarterback, where Oklahoma State transfer Hauss Hejny and UConn transfer K'saan Farrar are in a real battle for the No. 1 spot. Both are inexperienced at the college level, but both are also talented. Hejny is a former 4-star recruit who is lightning quick and a dangerous runner. Farrar also has good running ability and a strong arm. In this offense, dual-threat ability will be a necessity.

The offensive line is rebuilt as well. A couple of returning wide receivers (Tommy Maher and Lavon Brown) will pair with a bunch of newcomers who provide a lot of options but no clear No. 1 yet.

DEFENSE New head coach Jim L. Mora retained Tyson Summers as defensive coordinator (with Kenny McClendon joining as co-DC). Summers served as interim CSU head coach following the midseason firing of Jay Norvell. Summers' defense is built on aggressive, attacking play, but injuries prevented the Rams from realizing that vision last season. Newcomer Oumar Diomande, a linebacker, followed Mora from UConn and should be a centerpiece of the defense.

After CSU finished last season with virtually no healthy defensive linemen, this year's group should be bigger (both in terms of numbers and overall size). There are questions at cornerback due to some spring injuries. Appalachian State transfer Elijah Mc-Cantos will be a key back-end piece at safety. If the Rams are to see significant improvement, Summers' defense must be at or near the top of the Pac-12 in turnovers forced.

SPECIALISTS The special teams unit looks brand-new as well. CSU struggled in the kicking game last season, but North Texas transfer Kali Nguma should help clean that up. UConn transfer running back Mel Brown could be a dangerous kickoff returner.

FINAL ANALYSIS It's a season of change. Mora will try to unlock the potential he envisions at CSU; he has talked about championships from Day 1. The Rams are also changing leagues, beginning play in the new Pac-12.

Mora turned UConn around, creating hope that he could do the same in Fort Collins for a program that has underachieved for years. In addition to a revamped coaching staff, there are more than 60 new players at CSU, including several who followed Mora from UConn. There's a lot that's new, but the win-now urgency feels familiar.

2025 RESULTS (2-10, 1-7 MWC)

Aug. 30	at Washington	L	21-38
Sept. 6	Northern Colorado	W	21-17
Sept. 20	UTSA	L	16-17
Sept. 27	Washington State	L	3-20
Oct. 3	at San Diego State	L	24-45
Oct. 10	Fresno State	W	49-21
Oct. 18	Hawai'i	L	19-31
Oct. 25	at Wyoming	L	0-28
Nov. 8	UNLV	L	10-42
Nov. 15	at New Mexico	L	17-20
Nov. 22	at Boise State	L	21-49
Nov. 28	Air Force	L	21-42

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	Wyoming
Sept. 12	Southern Utah
Sept. 19	BYU
Sept. 26	at UTSA
Oct. 3	Oregon State
Oct. 17	at Texas State
Oct. 24	San Diego State
Oct. 31	at Utah State
Nov. 7	Boise State
Nov. 14	at Washington St.
Nov. 21	at Fresno State
Nov. 28	Texas State #

#Projected Flex Opponent

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Jaylen King, LB	★★★★
2.	Kallen Martinez, CB	★★★
3.	Justin Lewis, CB	★★★
4.	Jermaine Santana-Diaz, S	★★★
5.	Cedric Ross, WR	★★★
6.	Troy Foster, WR	★★★
7.	Darnell Kelly, QB	★★★
8.	Max Vivier, OT	★★★
9.	Damian Moore Jr., RB	★★★
10.	Mickey Williams, EDGE	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Jim L. Mora • Record at School: First Season • Career Record: 73-53 (10 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Pryce Tracy
Defensive Coordinators: Tyson Summers, Kenny McClendon • Location: Fort Collins, Colo. • Stadium: Canvas Stadium (36,500)

FRESNO STATE BULLDOGS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 68 | PAC-12 PREDICTION: 3 | 2025 RECORD: 9-4, 5-3 MWC

OFFENSE The Bulldogs lack experience at the quarterback position — the five players who took snaps in spring ball have played a total of 82 snaps at the FBS level. Khristian Martin and Jayden Mandal were the top two contenders, and both add a run-game element that head coach Matt Entz says the Bulldogs will utilize this season. Both also have the arm strength to push the football down the field, something the Bulldogs did very rarely last season. Martin, a transfer from Maryland, appears to be the front-runner to win the job.

The Bulldogs return their top three running backs in Rayshon Luke, Bryson Donelson and Brandon Ramirez as well as their top three wide-outs in Josiah Freeman, Ezekiel Avit and Jahlil McClain.

DEFENSE Fresno State was able to retain defensive coordinator Nick Benedetto and his staff after a stellar first season in the San Joaquin Valley. That's a big plus for the Bulldogs, who allowed only 285.7 yards per game, ranking first in the Mountain West Conference and 10th in the nation. They also were second in the nation in passing defense (153.8 ypg), tied for fourth in fewest plays of 20 or more yards allowed (36), fifth in interceptions (20) and 16th in scoring defense (18.8 ppg). They did that without a single player on the all-conference first team and only two on the second team.

The Bulldogs have potential standouts returning, including nickel Simeon Harris and linebackers K'vion Thunderbird and Tytus Khajavi, and this unit should continue to play at a high level. Similar numbers this season should result in more all-conference recognition.

SPECIALISTS Fresno State has one of the best special teams coaches in the country in John Baxter. Last season, the Bulldogs led the Mountain West in opponent kickoff and punt returns, allowing just 16.1 and 3.0 yards per return, respectively. Punter Nick Verdugo returns, but the Bulldogs have to replace kicker Dylan Lynch.

FINAL ANALYSIS Fresno State will be an improved team in Entz's second season, but will those gains outpace a schedule that will be more difficult than a year ago? The Bulldogs went 9-4 in 2025 and beat Miami (Ohio) in the Snoop Dogg Arizona Bowl, but their win total included victories over FCS Southern, Oregon State, Nevada, Wyoming and San José State, teams that went a combined 14-46.

To meet the challenge of a tougher schedule, expect a more diverse and dynamic offense that should have the Bulldogs in conference title contention and in a bowl for a sixth year in a row.

2025 RESULTS (9-4, 5-3 MWC)

Aug. 23	at Kansas	L	7-31
Aug. 30	Georgia Southern	W	42-14
Sept. 6	at Oregon State	W	36-27
Sept. 13	Southern	W	56-7
Sept. 20	at Hawai'i	W	23-21
Oct. 4	Nevada	W	20-17
Oct. 10	at Colorado State	L	21-49
Oct. 25	San Diego State	L	0-23
Nov. 1	at Boise State	W	30-7
Nov. 15	Wyoming	W	24-3
Nov. 22	Utah State	L	17-28
Nov. 29	at San José State	W	41-14
Dec. 27	vs. Miami (Ohio) #	W	18-3

#Arizona Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	at USC
Sept. 12	Sacramento State
Sept. 19	at San José State
Sept. 26	Rice
Oct. 3	at Washington St.
Oct. 10	Boise State
Oct. 17	at San Diego State
Oct. 31	Oregon State
Nov. 7	at Utah State
Nov. 14	at Texas State
Nov. 21	Colorado State
Nov. 28	San Diego State #

#Projected Flex Opponent

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Jhadis Luckey, RB	★★★★
2.	Isaiah Lucero, CB	★★★★
3.	Deagan Rose, QB	★★★
4.	Jake Plummer, EDGE	★★★
5.	Jaydon Sutko, LB	★★★
6.	Alex Rivera, IOL	★★★
7.	Solomon Baker, EDGE	★★★
8.	Xavier Owens, WR	★★★
9.	Cooper Willoughby, EDGE	★★★
10.	Jacob Chambers, QB	★★★

*Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Matt Entz • Record at School: 9-4 (1 year)
Career Record: 69-15 (6 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Josh Davis
Defensive Coordinator: Nick Benedetto • Location: Fresno, Calif.
Stadium: Valley Children's Stadium (40,727)

SIMEON HARRIS

SCOUTING THE BULLDOGS

"They have great schemes. I think they're coached really well. They got better as the season went on last year. That's coaching. The biggest challenge with them as they transition to the Pac-12 is, can they have the depth to keep building against a bigger conference? When you're a Group of 6 school and you've got three or four big-time games, it's easy to keep your players healthy. But with their roster, can they be more consistent? Can they stay healthy? ... We really got after them. I know they couldn't do much against us. But they did just get better and better. They've got good young linemen ... I think that [head coach] Matt Entz is a great coach. He's a proven winner."

— An opposing Pac-12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR	5	**JOSIAH FREEMAN (SR.)**	10	Jordan Malau'ulu (So.)
WR	0	**EZEKIEL AVIT (JR.)**	19	Harold Duval (So.)
WR	1	Jahlil McClain (Jr.)	11	Jayon Farrar (Sr.)
LT	76	**BRAYDEN WALTON (SO.)**	55	Marquise Thorpe-Taylor (So.)
LG	72	**EDWARD FONUA (SR.)**	63	Malcolm Polu Jr. (Fr.)
C	69	Oscar Weigel* (So.)	56	Ben Baker (So.)
RG	65	Jonah Leaupepetele (Fr.)	73	Marsel Akins (So.)
RT	71	**ROLAN FULLWOOD (SR.)**	75	Kyson Van Vugt (Sr.)
TE	87	Jake Appleget* (Sr.)	89	Brock Lium (Jr.)
QB	3	Khristian Martin* (So.)	7	Jayden Mandal (Jr.)
RB	2	Rayshon Luke (Sr.)	6	**BRYSON DONELSON (JR.)**

DEFENSE (6)

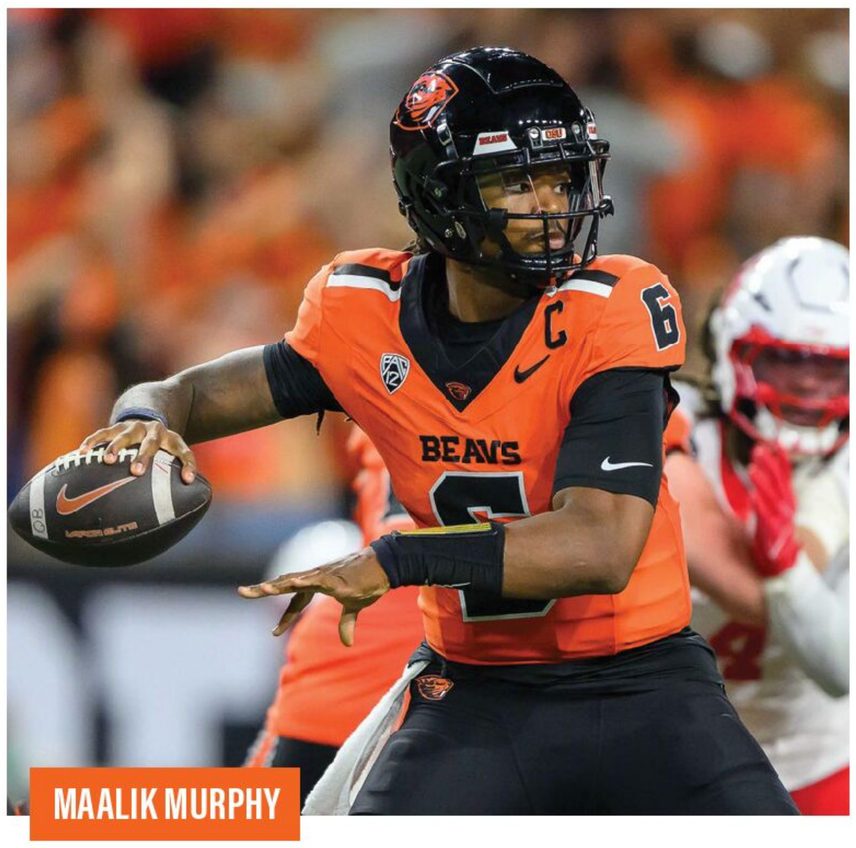
DE	6	**JAHZON JACKS (SR.)**	9	Merhauti Xepera (Sr.)
DT	0	**DEIJON LAFFITTE (JR.)**	89	Mordecai Hines (Jr.)
DT	8	**MARTIN OWUSU (JR.)**	56	Jairus Satele (Sr.)
DE	54	Sione Noa (Sr.)	11	Dylan Hampsten* (Jr.)
LB	10	**K'VION THUNDERBIRD (JR.)**	35	**TYTUS KHAJAVI (SO,)**
LB	18	Logan Studt (So.)	25	Justin Johnson (Jr.)
CB	31	Kiontre Harris (So.)	19	Preston Okafor* (So.)
CB	7	Loyall Mouzon (So.)	28	Jomarion Briggs (Sr.)
NB	5	**SIMEON HARRIS (SR.)**	2	Andre Cobb (Sr.)
S	4	Ethan Tierney (Jr.)	36	Tommy Nix (So.)
S	24	Croix Stewart* (Sr.)	20	RJ Regan (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	38	Manaki Watanabe* (So.)	KR	2	Rayshon Luke (Sr.)
P	41	Nick Verdugo (Sr.)	PR	10	Jordan Malau'ulu (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

MARK J. REBILAS-IMAGN IMAGES



MAALIK MURPHY

SCOUTING THE BEAVERS

"Their roster doesn't have a lot of continuity. I don't know what it was like with the transition with the new staff, but I thought they let a lot of pretty good players go to comparable teams, which usually doesn't speak well to internal operation with them understanding what they had. That's a huge no-no at this level. You can lose guys to the big dogs, but you can't lose them to teams that you want to beat. They have a little bit of an uphill battle with their talent pool this year. ... [New head coach JaMarcus Shephard] is a heck of a recruiter and a heck of a leader of men. He's a real motivator. That's what you need at a place like that. He's got connections in California and on the West Coast. I think he fits there with what they're trying to do."

— An opposing Pac-12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)

WR	7	Aeryn Hampton* (So.)	0	Aaron Butler* (So.)
WR	4	Xavyion Noland* (Jr.)	12	Jesse Legree (Fr.)
WR	5	Karson Boschma (Sr.)	17	Malachi Durant (So.)
LT	69	Kwan Johnson* (So.)	72	Noah Thomas (Fr.)
LG	**78**	**NATHAN ELU (SR.)**	76	Ben Hartman (Jr.)
C	58	Jack Wagner (So.)	56	Carter Guillaume* (So.)
RG	**79**	**TYLER VOLTIN (SR.)**	74	Jacob Anderson (Jr.)
RT	50	Teko Shoats* (Jr.)	71	Josiah Timoteo (Jr.)
TE	8	DeCorion Temple* (Sr.)	87	Jackson Bowers (Jr.)
QB	**6**	**MAALIK MURPHY (SR.)**	2	Braden Atkinson* (So.)
RB	3	Cornell Hatcher Jr. (So.)	23	AJ Newberry* (Sr.)

DEFENSE (4)

DE	**44**	**TAKARI HICKLE (SR.)**	99	Niklas Fisher (Fr.)
NT	59	Tevita Pome'e (Jr.)	62	Jacob Schuster (Sr.)
DT	97	Tyler Bailey* (Jr.)	91	Jaylen Hill (Fr.)
OLB	17	Ish Findlayter* (Jr.)	18	Jarrel Comer* (Jr.)
MLB	1	Dylan Layne* (Sr.)	9	Raesjon Davis (Sr.)
WLB	**2**	**AIDEN SULLIVAN (SR.)**	6	Jabari Odoemenem* (Sr.)
CB	4	TJ Crandall (Jr.)	23	Exodus Ayers (So.)
CB	**19**	**TREY GLASPER (SO.)**	29	Zephen Walker (Fr.)
NB	**8**	**SAILASA VADRAWALE III (JR.)**	36	Drake Vickers (Sr.)
S	0	Harlem Howard (Jr.)	22	Isaiah Houi* (Jr.)
S	7	Kahanu Kalahiki* (So.)	38	Milan Clark (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	28	Caleb Ojeda (Sr.)	KR	4	Xavyion Noland* (Jr.)
P	38	AJ Winsor (Jr.)	PR	4	Xavyion Noland* (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** · *2026 TRANSFER

CRAIG STROBECK-IMAGN IMAGES

OREGON STATE BEAVERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 101 | PAC-12 PREDICTION: 8 | 2025 RECORD: 2-10

OFFENSE For the first time since 2019, Oregon State has the chance to start the same Week 1 quarterback in back-to-back years. Former 4-star recruit Maalik Murphy has to win the job first, though. First-year head coach JaMarcus Shephard says that Murphy, along with transfers Braden Atkinson (FCS Mercer) and Brady Jones (Western Michigan), are in an open competition for QB1. Shephard said this spring that he didn't intend to name a starter until mid-August, at the earliest.

Whichever of the three wins the job has a bevy of young, unproven weapons around him. Redshirt sophomore running back Cornell Hatcher Jr. looked impressive in limited reps last fall and is the Beavers' leading returner in the backfield. Wide receiver Xayvion Noland had a breakout year at FCS upstart UT Rio Grande Valley last season and looks ready to be a factor in the passing game.

Tackle transfers Teko Shoats and Kwan Johnson played lots of football in 2025 at the FCS level and look to anchor the Beavers' offensive line this fall. Tyler Voltin missed the spring but is a key piece at guard.

DEFENSE Aiden Sullivan, the Beavers' No. 2 tackler last season, and transfer Dylan Layne from FCS Idaho make for an intriguing tandem at linebacker. Cornerback TJ Crandall made noise in the spring after missing 2025 with an injury and looks like a cornerstone of defensive coordinator Mike McIntyre's unit. Cornerback Trey Glasper played as much as anyone during an up-and-down freshman season and, like Sullivan, was a key piece to retain for 2026.

Takari Hickle battled injuries throughout his career until last season and, according to Shephard, was "unblockable" in the spring. Only time will tell whether it's a testament to Hickle's growth or a condemnation of Oregon State's offensive line.

SPECIALISTS Oregon State endured one of the worst (if not the worst) special teams seasons of all time in 2025 after numerous long-snapper injuries. Placekicker Caleb Ojeda and punter AJ Winsor are back for 2026 with a pair of new snappers, Jonathan Zarut and Tug Sanford, brought in.

FINAL ANALYSIS It's hard to perform much worse than Oregon State's' 2-10 season a year ago, but Year 1 in the new-look Pac-12 will challenge Shephard's first Beavers team. Physically, the team looked small in the spring, on the defensive line in particular, and had numerous pieces absent with lingering injury issues. With non-conference opponents Houston and Texas Tech leading off the schedule, September may be unkind to Oregon State. The fan base is hungry for the team to get back to where it was in 2023 when it won eight games, but bowl eligibility would be a win in itself.

2025 RESULTS (2-10)

Aug. 30	Cal	L	15-34
Sept. 6	Fresno State	L	27-36
Sept. 13	at Texas Tech	L	14-45
Sept. 20	at Oregon	L	7-41
Sept. 26	Houston (ot)	L	24-27
Oct. 4	at Appalachian State	L	23-27
Oct. 11	Wake Forest	L	14-39
Oct. 18	Lafayette	W	45-13
Nov. 1	Washington State	W	10-7
Nov. 8	Sam Houston	L	17-21
Nov. 15	at Tulsa	L	14-31
Nov. 29	at Washington State	L	8-32

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	at Houston
Sept. 12	Texas Tech
Sept. 19	Montana
Sept. 26	at UTEP
Oct. 3	at Colorado State
Oct. 10	San Diego State
Oct. 17	Washington State
Oct. 31	at Fresno State
Nov. 7	Texas State
Nov. 14	at Boise State
Nov. 21	Utah State
Nov. 28	at Washington St.#

#Projected Flex Opponent

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Cynai Thomas, WR	★★★
2.	Jarrel Comer, EDGE	★★★
2.	Jameson Powell, WR	★★★
3.	Tre Garrison, RB	★★★
4.	Kai Wheaton, CB	★★★
5.	Jeremiah Brown, LB	★★★
6.	Xander Chisolm, S	★★★
7.	RJ Whitten, S	★★★
8.	Adel Dorr, EDGE	★★★
9.	Jesse Legree, ATH	★★★
10.	Caleb Metzner, EDGE	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: JaMarcus Shephard • Record at School: First Season • Career Record: First Season • Offensive Coordinators: Mitch Dahlen, Ryan Wallace • Defensive Coordinators: Mike MacIntyre, Cort Dennison • Location: Corvallis, Ore. • Stadium: Reser Stadium (35,548)

SAN DIEGO STATE AZTECS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 67 | PAC-12 PREDICTION: 2 | 2025 RECORD: 9-4, 6-2 MWC

OFFENSE Senior Jayden Denegal (143-for-243, 1,807 yards, nine TDs, eight INTs) gives the Aztecs something they haven't often had of late — a returning starting QB. Even better, Denegal is healthy after being bothered by shoulder issues that limited his practice time and required postseason surgery on his left (non-throwing) shoulder.

Senior Lucky Sutton (1,297 yards, 10 TDs) is among the nation's top returning running backs. Colorado State transfer RB Javion Kinnard provides a boost as a receiving threat out of the backfield. Senior backup QB Bert Emanuel Jr. moves to wide receiver to take advantage of his unique skill set. It was evident when he started in the New Mexico Bowl, rushing for 170 yards and two TDs in a quarter and a half. Starting wideouts Jordan Napier and Jacob Bostick both are coming off reconstructive knee surgery, but there's more depth at the position than SDSU has had in more than a decade.

DEFENSE The Aztecs will be hard-pressed to match last year's unit, which ranked sixth nationally in scoring defense (15.4 ppg) and 11th in total defense (293.7 ypg), after losing their top three defenders — edge Trey White to Texas Tech, linebacker Owen Chambliss to Nebraska and cornerback Chris Johnson to the NFL. Transfer Nate Henrich (Div. II Gannon University) is among the candidates they're counting on at edge.

Senior Tano Letuli is a standout linebacker, but he's coming off reconstructive knee surgery. Senior transfer Sione Hala (FCS Weber State) could be another productive 'backer. Senior safety Dalesean Staley is the only returning starter in the secondary.

SPECIALISTS The Aztecs' kicking and punting has been a strong suit for the better part of a decade. But there's uncertainty following the graduation of Gabriel Plascencia, the most accurate placekicker in school history, and the transfer of punter Hunter Green, who left for Washington. Sophomore Nick Clegg assumes the kicking duties, and senior Tashi Dorje, who averaged 50 yards on three punts, will handle the punting chores. The return game should be solid, especially with Napier and Kinnard, who both were All-Mountain West punt returners last season.

FINAL ANALYSIS SDSU moves into the reconstituted Pac-12 on the heels of a massive turnaround in 2025, improving from 3-9 to 9-4. The Aztecs gained more than they lost in the transfer portal, so it's reasonable to believe they could approach nine wins once again — assuming that the offense, which ranked 78th nationally in scoring (26.4 ppg), is more productive with an experienced, healthy QB and more weapons around him.

2025 RESULTS (9-4, 6-2 MWC)

Aug. 28	Stony Brook	W	42-0
Sept. 6	at Washington State	L	13-36
Sept. 20	Cal	W	34-0
Sept. 27	at Northern Illinois	W	6-3
Oct. 3	Colorado State	W	45-24
Oct. 11	at Nevada	W	44-10
Oct. 25	at Fresno State	W	23-0
Nov. 1	Wyoming	W	24-7
Nov. 8	at Hawai'i	L	6-38
Nov. 15	Boise State	W	17-7
Nov. 22	San José State	W	25-3
Nov. 28	at New Mexico (ot)	L	17-23
Dec. 27	vs. North Texas #	L	47-49

#New Mexico Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	Portland State
Sept. 12	at UCLA
Sept. 19	James Madison
Sept. 26	at Toledo
Oct. 3	Texas State
Oct. 10	at Oregon State
Oct. 17	Fresno State
Oct. 24	at Colorado State
Oct. 31	Washington State
Nov. 14	Utah State
Nov. 21	at Boise State
Nov. 28	at Fresno State #

#Projected Flex Opponent

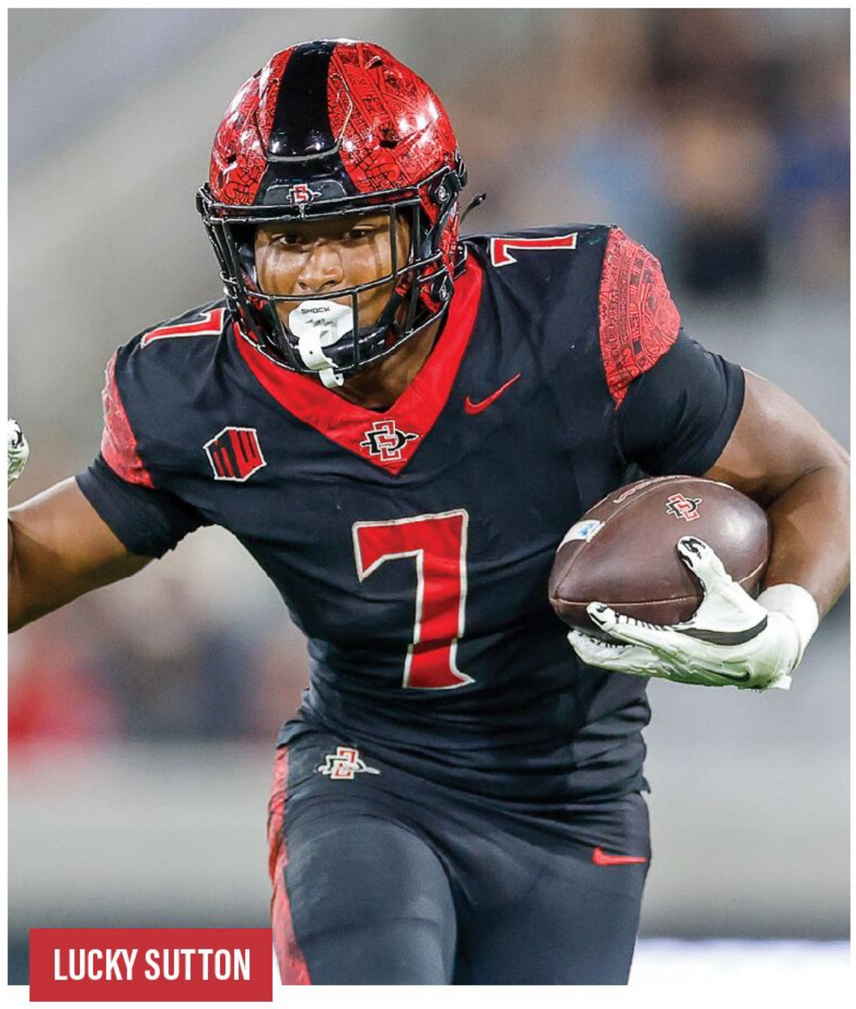
TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Derek Stevenson, WR	★★★★
2.	Josiah Lucas, RB	★★★
3.	Alijah Lash, EDGE	★★★
4.	Robby Lavata'i, EDGE	★★★
5.	Jeramiah Lewis, LB	★★★
7.	Marshel Sanders, WR	★★★
8.	Tainoa Lave, S	★★★
9.	Dominic Coelho, DL	★★★
10.	Daishaun Davis, WR	★★★

*Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Sean Lewis • Record at School: 12-13 (2 years)
Career Record: 36-44 (7 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Matt Johnson
Defensive Coordinator: Demetrius Sumler • Location: San Diego, Calif.
Stadium: Snapdragon Stadium (35,000)



LUCKY SUTTON

SCOUTING THE AZTECS

"I think that [head coach] Sean Lewis has done an excellent job there. They built that new stadium a few years ago, and I think that they're really gung-ho with really wanting to be good in football. That new stadium just makes it a lot more attractive for kids to go there. ... Sean has the ability to win there. Losing [defensive coordinator Rob Aurich to Nebraska] is tough, but they can get good players at San Diego State. They always have. I think now having the facilities that they have should keep that program on the rise."

— An opposing Pac-12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (7)

WR	2	**JORDAN NAPIER (JR.)**	13	Nathan Acevedo (Sr.)
WR	17	**JACOB BOSTICK (SR.)**	14	**DONOVAN BROWN (SR.)**
WR	5	Bert Emanuel Jr. (Sr.)	18	Justius Lowe* (Sr.)
LT	78	**JOSEPH BORJON (SR.)**	77	Cam May (Sr.)
LG	76	**KALAN ELLIS (SR.)**	73	Evan Lawrence* (So.)
C	55	Michael Leville Watkins (So.)	63	Isaac Lucas (Jr.)
RG	67	Matthew Montgomery* (Jr.)	69	Alex Bleszynski (Fr.)
RT	65	Dennis Jones* (Sr.)	70	Mercer Luniewski* (So.)
TE	15	Jackson Ford (Jr.)	88	Ryan Wolfer (So.)
QB	4	**JAYDEN DENEGAL (SR.)**	12	Stone Saunders* (So.)
RB	7	**LUCKY SUTTON (SR.)**	21	Javion Kinnard* (So.)

DEFENSE (3)

EDGE	33	Brady Nassar (Sr.)	10	Lucan Amituanai (Fr.)
DT	11	Krishna Clay (Sr.)	48	Kainoa Davis (So.)
DT	18	**MALACHI FINAU (SR.)**	91	Amari Comier* (Sr.)
EDGE	97	Nate Henrich* (Jr.)	40	Charlie Stewart (Sr.)
LB	21	**TANO LETULI (SR.)**	31	Jeramiah Lewis* (So.)
LB	56	Sione Hala* (Sr.)	42	Cameron Cooper* (Jr.)
CB	83	Jamison Starks (So.)	32	Caleb Ricks* (So.)
CB	27	Mike Lindsay* (So.)	43	Braylon Cardwell (Fr.)
S	9	**DALESEAN STALEY (SR.)**	13	Prince Williams (So.)
S	24	Josiah Cox (Sr.)	20	Jelani McLaughlin (Jr.)
S	29	Josh Hunter (Sr.)	36	Isaiah Green* (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	18	Nick Clegg (So.)	KR	20	Christian Washington (Sr.)
P	89	Tashi Dorje (Sr.)	PR	21	Javion Kinnard* (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

DAVID FRERKER-IMAGN IMAGES

BRAD JACKSON

SCOUTING THE BOBCATS

"Everybody thinks that [head coach] GJ Kinne is an excellent young coach who's doing a good job there, and he's had excellent offenses, so I know that he's well respected. As far as playing complementary football, can they control the clock in the last four minutes of a game and not give the ball back? There's nothing against playing fast and scoring, but it's just about if you have to slow it down and keep the clock running. If they can do that, they'll be able to be a good football team. ... People are really high on [Kinne] from what I've seen. That's a team that's returning a lot of talent. We definitely have eyes on them. It's a huge testament to him. He's done a great job there."

— An opposing Pac-12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)				
WR	11	**BEAU SPARKS (SR.)**		La'Keyleon Graves (Fr.)
WR	1	**CHRIS DAWN JR. (SR.)**	2	Kylen Evans (So.)
WR		Zechariah Sample* (So.)		Dameon Crowe (Fr.)
LT	68	**SULLY BURNS (SR.)**		Jaylen Early* (Sr.)
LG	53	Cameron Schultz (Jr.)	72	Kirk Gildon (Fr.)
C	66	Justin DeLeon (Jr.)	70	Ameer Ross (Fr.)
RG	75	Bamidele Badusi (Jr.)	55	Etueni Ropati (Jr.)
RT		Rasheed Jackson* (Jr.)		William Boone* (Jr.)
TE	16	**BLAKE SMITH (SR.)**	18	Ty Stamey (Jr.)
QB	8	**BRAD JACKSON (SO.)**	17	Gavin Parkhurst (Fr.)
RB	5	Jaylen Jenkins (Sr.)	4	Torrance Burgess Jr. (Sr.)
DEFENSE (4)				
DE	6	Jo'Laison Landry (Jr.)	33	Blake Isbell (Fr.)
DT		Tae Woody* (Sr.)		Phillip Bradford* (Jr.)
DT	96	**BRYCE CARTER (SR.)**	91	J.P. Deeter (Jr.)
EDGE	15	DonTerry Russell (Sr.)	35	Ta'Derius Collins (Jr.)
ILB	16	Terrence Cooks II (Sr.)	46	**AYDEN JONES (JR.)**
ILB		Javante Mackey* (Jr.)	45	Cole Nilles (Jr.)
CB	18	Craig Royal Jr. (Sr.)	27	Cordarian Powell (Fr.)
CB	24	Trez Moore (Sr.)	17	Christopher Jones (So.)
NB	22	Will Mitchell II (So.)	23	**AMARION ATWOOD (JR.)**
S	7	**RYAN NOLAN (SR.)**	26	Chase Davis (Jr.)
S	14	Jayden Bradley (Fr.)	37	Jayden Lawton (Sr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K		Dylan Cunanan* (Jr.)	KR 5	Jaylen Jenkins (Sr.)
P		Thomas Flintoff* (Fr.)	PR 11	Beau Sparks (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** · *2026 TRANSFER

MATT BUSH/SPECIAL TO THE CLARION LEDGER

TEXAS STATE BOBCATS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 93 | PAC-12 PREDICTION: 6 | 2025 RECORD: 7-6, 3-5 SUN BELT

OFFENSE Head coach GJ Kinne has lived up to his promise to "light up the scoreboard" since he arrived at Texas State in 2022. The Bobcats have led the Sun Belt Conference in total yards and finished at least second in scoring in each of the past three seasons.

As Texas State joins the revived Pac-12 Conference, Kinne will finally have the same starter behind center for consecutive seasons. Sophomore Brad Jackson returns after throwing for 3,224 yards and 21 touchdowns and rushing for 744 yards and 17 scores.

The Bobcats were the only FBS program with two 1,000-yard receivers in 2025 — Beau Sparks (1,200) and Chris Dawn Jr. (1,007) — and both are returning as seniors. With their most impactful contributors returning, the Bobcats will be in the end zone often.

DEFENSE As exciting as Texas State's offense has been under Kinne, the defense has been a point of aggravation. Late-game mistakes and an inability to hold on to leads led to offseason changes.

South Alabama defensive coordinator Will Windham, who promises to bring multiple looks and a more disciplined attitude, replaces two-year defensive coordinator Dexter McCoil.

The retention rate isn't as high on defense as it is on offense, but Windham will have the services of three of the Bobcats' top six tacklers from 2025 — senior safety Ryan Nolan (79) and senior linebackers Ayden Jones (56) and Terrence Cooks II (36).

SPECIALISTS Texas State's past two kickers transferred to power programs following strong seasons — Mason Shipley to Texas after 2024 and Tyler Robles to Washington last season. Toledo transfer Dylan Cunanan hopes to replicate their success after making 23-of-32 (72%) field-goal attempts the past two seasons. Australian freshman Thomas Flintoff takes over the punting duties. Jaylen Jenkins returns for his senior season after leading the Sun Belt in yards per kickoff return (27.0) in 2025, including a 100-yard touchdown against South Alabama.

FINAL ANALYSIS Texas State is averaging 36.5 points per game the past three seasons under Kinne and is returning nearly all of its skill-position players on offense. But Texas State can't truly contend on offense alone, or it would have done so already. Final records of 8-5 in 2023, 8-5 in 2024 and 7-6 in 2025 prove that a potent offense can net a winning record, but an undisciplined defense will prevent any contention for a conference championship. If the changes made on defense work, the Bobcats will compete for a Pac-12 championship in 2026.

2025 RESULTS (7-6, 3-5 SUN BELT)

Aug. 30	Eastern Michigan	W	52-27
Sept. 6	at UTSA	W	43-36
Sept. 13	at Arizona State	L	15-34
Sept. 20	Nicholls	W	35-3
Oct. 4	at Arkansas State	L	30-31
Oct. 11	Troy (ot)	L	41-48
Oct. 18	at Marshall (ot)	L	37-40
Oct. 28	James Madison	L	20-52
Nov. 8	at Louisiana	L	39-42
Nov. 15	at Southern Miss	W	41-14
Nov. 22	ULM	W	31-14
Nov. 29	South Alabama	W	49-26
Jan. 2	vs. Rice #	W	41-10

#Armed Forces Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	at Texas
Sept. 12	UTSA
Sept. 19	North Texas
Sept. 26	Incarnate Word
Oct. 3	at San Diego State
Oct. 17	Colorado State
Oct. 24	Utah State
Oct. 31	at Boise State
Nov. 7	at Oregon State
Nov. 14	Fresno State
Nov. 21	Washington State
Nov. 28	at Colorado State #

#Projected Flex Opponent

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Cullen Thompson, EDGE	★★★
2.	Lakeyleon Graves, ATH	★★★
3.	Xavier Warren, WR	★★★
4.	Easton Webb, QB	★★★
5.	Jayden Luckett, OT	★★★
6.	Devin Davis, EDGE	★★★
7.	Blake McLane, WR	★★★
8.	Dameon Crowe, WR	★★★
9.	Juntavious Harris, RB	★★★
10.	Jayden Flournoy, CB	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: GJ Kinne • Record at School: 23-16 (3 years) • Career Record: 35-18 (4 years) • Offensive Coordinators: Landon Keopple, Jordan Shoemaker • Defensive Coordinators: Will Windham, Matthew Gregg • Location: San Marcos, Texas • Stadium: UFCU Stadium (27,149)

UTAH STATE AGGIES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 92 | PAC-12 PREDICTION: 5 | 2025 RECORD: 6-7, 4-4 MWC

OFFENSE The Aggies are likely turning to a familiar face to orchestrate the offense. Quarterback McCae Hillstead has transferred back to Utah State after two seasons at BYU. The junior played a lot as a true freshman for the Aggies and threw for 399 yards at home against James Madison.

USU lost two solid performers at wide receiver but does return Swiss Army knife Anthony Garcia, who produced seven touchdowns in 2025. The Aggies have brought in Eli Wood, who finished strong last season at Virginia, and slot target Javon Robinson (Georgia State) from the transfer portal to shore up that position. Robinson caught 58 passes a year ago.

The Aggies, who averaged 30.9 points and 409.5 total yards last season, return a proven commodity in running back Javen Jacobs, who accounted for 1,058 all-purpose yards and eight TDs as a junior.

USU head coach Bronco Mendenhall has brought in a familiar face at offensive coordinator in Robert Anae, who has worked with Mendenhall for 15 seasons, to replace Kevin McGiven, who departed to Utah.

DEFENSE There is some continuity on defense for the Aggies, who will need to improve on that side of the ball after allowing 440.1 yards — last in the Mountain West — and 28.7 points per outing last season.

Defensive coordinator Nick Howell is back, and the Aggies also returned a pair of honorable mention All-Mountain West honorees in safety Brevin Hamblin and linebacker Bronson Olevao Jr. The other three returning starters are defensive linemen Tyree Morris and Carson Tujague and linebacker Chris Joe.

The Aggies have brought in some notable athletes from the portal, highlighted by safety Chapman Lewis and cornerback Antonio Bluiett, who was an honorable mention FCS All-American at North Dakota last fall. Lewis started at Texas Tech in 2024.

SPECIALISTS USU has a new kicker in Kian Afrookhteh, who was an honorable mention All-Sun Belt performer last year at Coastal Carolina. USU returns punter Landon Rehkow, who averaged 42.9 yards per punt. The Aggies have a proven commodity at long-snapper in 2024 freshman All-American Hyrum Hatch. Jacobs is a weapon on returns.

FINAL ANALYSIS The Aggies, who went 6-7 during Mendenhall's first season at the helm, will play two power-conference opponents on the road — just like they did last season — in Washington and Utah. USU will likely have to face Boise State twice in '26. Making a return trip to a bowl game will be a challenge. USU beat only one opponent that went bowling a season ago and will likely need to defeat three 2025 bowl teams.

2025 RESULTS (6-7, 4-4 MWC)

Aug. 30	UTEP	W	28-16
Sept. 6	at Texas A&M	L	22-44
Sept. 13	Air Force	W	49-30
Sept. 20	McNeese	W	48-7
Sept. 27	at Vanderbilt	L	35-55
Oct. 11	at Hawai'i	L	26-44
Oct. 17	San José State	W	30-25
Oct. 25	at New Mexico	L	14-33
Nov. 8	Nevada	W	51-14
Nov. 15	at UNLV (ot)	L	26-29
Nov. 22	at Fresno State	W	28-17
Nov. 28	Boise State	L	24-25
Dec. 22	vs. Washington State #	L	21-34

#Famous Idaho Potato Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	Idaho State
Sept. 12	at Washington
Sept. 19	at Utah
Sept. 26	Troy
Oct. 3	at Boise State
Oct. 10	Washington State
Oct. 24	at Texas State
Oct. 31	Colorado State
Nov. 7	Fresno State
Nov. 14	at San Diego State
Nov. 21	at Oregon State
Nov. 28	Boise State #

#Projected Flex Opponent

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Viliami Tapa'atoutai, EDGE	★★★
2.	Brody Flores, LB	★★★
3.	Dontae Dyson, CB	★★★
4.	John McClellan, LB	★★★
5.	Tripp Palmer, ATH	★★★
6.	Kaina Watson, WR	★★★
7.	Brady Goodman, QB	★★★
8.	Cade McCall, WR	★★★
9.	Kaleb Maryland, QB	★★★
10.	Luke Baker, OT	★★★

*Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Bronco Mendenhall • Record at School: 6-7 (1 year)
Career Record: 146-95 (19 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Robert Anae
Defensive Coordinator: Nick Howell • Location: Logan, Utah
Stadium: Maverik Stadium (25,513)

JAVEN JACOBS

SCOUTING THE AGGIES

"They got better and better over the course of last season. Effort, awareness, instincts. They didn't lose a ton. It's pretty clear that they're gonna have an advantage with continuity compared to some of the other teams in our conference. From the outside looking in, their coaching staff does a good job of being efficient with the resources that they have. ... The 3-3-5 defense is excellent, but people have been running it for a while. If you watch 3-3-5 teams, those coaches have kind of changed what they're doing because people kind of figured it out. But [head coach] Bronco Mendenhall is a heck of a coach, and I know he'll figure out what he needs to do to have a good defense."

— An opposing Pac-12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)

WR	10	Anthony Garcia (Jr.)		Rex Haynes* (Jr.)
WR	6	Demick Starling (Sr.)		Eli Wood* (Sr.)
WR		Javon Robinson* (Sr.)		LJ Johnson Jr.* (So.)
LT		John Randle Jr.* (So.)		Chewy Wade* (So.)
LG	72	**GEORGE MAILE (SR.)**		Kadin Lynch* (Sr.)
C	55	**JIMMY LISTON (JR.)**	63	Jarvis Griffiths (Jr.)
RG	65	**TAVO MOTU'APUAKA (SR.)**	61	K'leyone Iosua (Jr.)
RT		Seth Wilfred* (Jr.)	54	Jackson Nelson (So.)
TE	18	Kache Kaio (Jr.)		Collin Remenowsky* (Sr.)
QB		McCae Hillstead* (Jr.)		Grady Brosterhous* (Sr.)
RB	8	**JAVEN JACOBS (SR.)**	23	Noah White (So.)

DEFENSE (5)

DE	28	**CARSON TUJAGUE (SO.)**		Adonis Jackson* (Sr.)
NT		Ta'avili Tuitama* (Sr.)	92	Joshua Papu (So.)
DE	9	**TYREE MORRIS (SR.)**		Kasen Long* (So.)
BUCK	14	**BRONSON OLEVAO JR. (SR.)**		Asher Cunningham* (Jr.)
SLB	25	**CHRIS JOE (SO.)**	17	Mataira Brown (Jr.)
MLB		Harrison Taggart* (Sr.)	31	Dakota Howell (So.)
WLB		James Jennette* (Sr.)		Jeremiah Holmes* (Sr.)
CB		Antonio Bluiett* (Sr.)	15	D'Angelo Mayes (Jr.)
CB		Markie Grant* (So.)	38	John Shepard (Jr.)
NB	12	Bobby Arnold (Sr.)	27	Chika Ebunoha (Sr.)
BS	4	**BREVIN HAMBLIN (SR.)**	32	Charger Doty (So.)
FS		Chapman Lewis* (Jr.)	26	D'Andre Barnes (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K		Kian Afrookhteh* (Sr.)	KR 23	Noah White (So.)
P	19	Landon Rehkow (Jr.)	PR 8	Javen Jacobs (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

SEAN THOMAS-IMAGN IMAGES

TONY FREEMAN

SCOUTING THE COUGARS

"I thought that they made a couple of pretty good adds, but they just lost so many guys. I think it'll take some time with them. I actually think how they're recruiting right now, with how we evaluate that, they graded pretty highly. They struck me as a team that did pretty well trying to build in the portal. It's just so tough when you lose so many pieces. ... Oregon State and Washington State had a really nice advantage over the rest of the conference as being two teams that were real Pac-12 teams before this shift. They have resources that pretty much all the other teams in the Pac-12 who are coming from the Mountain West need to try to get to their level. I haven't seen anybody talking about that, but I think about it all the time."

— An opposing Pac-12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)

WR	0	**TONY FREEMAN (SR.)**	8	Branden Ganashamoorthy (Jr.)
WR	1	Daniel Blood* (Sr.)	13	Ryan McKendry* (So.)
WR	10	Tank Hawkins* (So.)	4	Darrius Clemons* (Sr.)
LT	71	**ASHTON TRIPP (JR.)**	54	Xavier Thorpe (So.)
LG	67	**JONNY LESTER (SR.)**	68	Chris Lino (So.)
C	69	Kyle Martin (Jr.)	55	Arion Williams (Fr.)
RG	75	Noah Dunham (Jr.)	77	Nick Bakken (So.)
RT	74	Maximus McCree* (Sr.)	64	Jaylin Caldwell (Sr.).
TE	23	**TREY LECKNER (JR.)**	28	Jack Pedersen* (Sr.)
QB	12	Caden Pinnick* (So.)	17	Owen Eshelman (Fr.)
RB	9	**KIRBY VORHEES (JR.)**	3	Maxwell Woods (So.)

DEFENSE (0)

DE	9	Matyus McLain* (Jr.)	51	Ben Beatty (So.)
DT	52	Kaden Beatty (Jr.)	98	Jirah Leaupepetele* (Jr.)
DT	34	Damarjhe Lewis* (Sr.)	99	Paul Hutson III* (Sr.)
DE	6	Linus Zunk* (Sr.)	5	Michael Hughes (Jr.)
LB	21	Keith Brown (Sr.)	16	Isaiah Hung (Fr.)
LB	15	DJ Warner* (Jr.)	29	Erimus Wright (Fr.)
LB	8	Nylan Brown* (Jr.)	33	Gage Jones (So.)
CB	22	Jalil Tucker* (Sr.)	2	Jamarey Smith (Fr.)
CB	13	Khamari Terrell* (Sr.)	23	Ishmael Gibbs (Fr.)
SS	3	Jaylen Thomas* (So.)	19	Kayo Patu (So.)
FS	1	Jeremiah Bernard* (Jr.)	17	Jshawn Frausto-Ramos* (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	38	Jack Stevens (So.)	KR 10	Tank Hawkins* (So.)
P	32	Max Dean* (So.)	PR 0	Tony Freeman (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** · *2026 TRANSFER

PETRE THOMAS-IMAGN IMAGES

WASHINGTON STATE COUGARS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 88 | PAC-12 PREDICTION: 4 | 2025 RECORD: 7-6

OFFENSE In 2026, Washington State's offense could shift back to the high-flying approach that fans across the country have come to recognize. But many of the faces behind the operation will be new. WSU's quarterback could be rising redshirt sophomore Caden Pinnick, a transfer from FCS UC Davis, where he put up gaudy numbers and won the Big Sky Freshman of the Year award. Or it could be returner Owen Eshelman, a redshirt freshman, who has also impressed during spring practices.

The good news for the Cougars is that no matter who starts, he'll have some experienced teammates around him. WSU returns a number of experienced offensive linemen — left tackle Ashton Tripp, left guard Jonny Lester, center Kyle Martin, right guard Noah Dunham, right tackle Jaylin Caldwell — plus a transfer in veteran Maximus McCree. That group will help carve out lanes for the running back trio of Kirby Vorhees, Maxwell Woods and Leo Pulalasi, who combined for 212 carries for 1,006 yards and five touchdowns last season, the majority coming from Vorhees.

DEFENSE The Cougars' defense will likely sink or swim based on the performance of the line. They lost a lot at that position over the offseason, including six key players who followed former head coach Jimmy Rogers to Iowa State, but they may have replaced much of that production via the transfer portal.

WSU can likely count on a consistent pass rush from ends Matyus McLain (42 tackles, 13.5 for a loss, 4.5 sacks, one forced fumble at FCS Idaho last year) and Linus Zunk (15 tackles, 3.5 for a loss, three sacks at Vanderbilt last year), but the Cougars have less experience on the interior. They will roll out a combination of Kaden Beatty, Purdue transfer Damarjhe Lewis, Marshall transfer Paul Hutson III and FCS Eastern Washington transfer Jirah Leaupepetele.

SPECIALISTS Kicker Jack Stevens is back after his WSU debut season last fall, when he connected on 16-of-19 field goals and made all 33 of his extra points. Punter Max Dean, a transfer from New Mexico State, totaled 55 punts for an average of 42.3 yards for the Aggies last season. Look for Florida transfer wideout Tank Hawkins to return kickoffs and/or punts.

FINAL ANALYSIS After another offseason of big roster turnover at WSU, the Cougars' offense will look more familiar. In the first year of the rebuilt Pac-12, new head coach Kirby Moore will guide an offense replete with talent, even if there are some unanswered questions at the QB spot. Depending on how the Cougs' defense fares, this team could compete for a high finish in the new conference.

2025 RESULTS (7-6)

Aug. 30	Idaho	W	13-10
Sept. 6	San Diego State	W	36-13
Sept. 13	at North Texas	L	10-59
Sept. 20	Washington	L	24-59
Sept. 27	at Colorado State	W	20-3
Oct. 11	at Ole Miss	L	21-24
Oct. 18	at Virginia	L	20-22
Oct. 25	Toledo	W	28-7
Nov. 1	at Oregon State	L	7-10
Nov. 15	Louisiana Tech	W	28-3
Nov. 22	at James Madison	L	20-24
Nov. 29	Oregon State	W	32-8
Dec. 22	vs. Utah State #	W	34-21

#Famous Idaho Potato Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	at Washington
Sept. 12	at Kansas State
Sept. 19	Duquesne
Sept. 26	Arizona
Oct. 3	Fresno State
Oct. 10	at Utah State
Oct. 17	at Oregon State
Oct. 24	Boise State
Oct. 31	at San Diego State
Nov. 14	Colorado State
Nov. 21	at Texas State
Nov. 28	Oregon State #

#Projected Flex Opponent

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Ryan McKendry, WR	★★★
2.	Nathaniel Salmon, TE	★★★
3	Lance McGee, LB	★★★
4.	Tremayne Hill, RB	★★★
5.	CJ Toney, RB	★★★
6.	JaVon Joseph, EDGE	★★★
7.	Bryce Heckard, CB	★★★
8.	Cooper Daines, IOL	★★★
9.	Bryson Flynn, LB	★★★
10.	Elmo Wartson, CB	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Kirby Moore • Record at School: First Season
Career Record: First Season • Offensive Coordinator: Matt Miller
Defensive Coordinator: Trent Bray • Location: Pullman, Wash.
Stadium: Martin Stadium (32,952)

SEC PREVIEW

PREDICTED ORDER OF FINISH

1. GEORGIA BULLDOGS
2. TEXAS LONGHORNS
3. OKLAHOMA SOONERS
4. TEXAS A&M AGGIES
5. LSU TIGERS
6. OLE MISS REBELS
7. ALABAMA CRIMSON TIDE
8. TENNESSEE VOLUNTEERS
9. FLORIDA GATORS
10. SOUTH CAROLINA GAMECOCKS
11. MISSOURI TIGERS
12. AUBURN TIGERS
13. MISSISSIPPI STATE BULLDOGS
14. VANDERBILT COMMODORES
15. KENTUCKY WILDCATS
16. ARKANSAS RAZORBACKS

SEC CHAMPIONSHIP

GEORGIA OVER TEXAS

ALL-SEC TEAM

FIRST-TEAM OFFENSE		
QB	ARCH MANNING	Texas
RB	AHMAD HARDY	Missouri
RB	KEWAN LACY	Ole Miss
AP	JADAN BAUGH	Florida
WR	CAM COLEMAN	Texas
WR	RYAN COLEMAN-WILLIAMS	Alabama
WR	MARIO CRAVER	Texas A&M
TE	TREY'DEZ GREEN	LSU
C	DREW BOBO	Georgia
OL	TREVOR GOOSBY	Texas
OL	CAYDEN GREEN	Missouri
OL	EARNEST GREENE III	Georgia
OL	JORDAN SEATON	LSU

FIRST-TEAM DEFENSE		
DL	COLIN SIMMONS	Texas
DL	DYLAN STEWART	South Carolina
DL	DAVID STONE	Oklahoma
DL	TAYLOR WEIN	Oklahoma
LB	WHIT WEEKS	LSU
LB	XAVIER ATKINS	Auburn
LB	RASHEEM BILES	Texas
LB	RAYLEN WILSON	Georgia
CB	ELLIS ROBINSON IV	Georgia
CB	KELLEY JONES	Mississippi State
S	KJ BOLDEN	Georgia
S	BRAY HUBBARD	Alabama

FIRST-TEAM SPECIALISTS		
K	TATE SANDELL	Oklahoma
P	GRAYSON MILLER	Oklahoma
KR	RAYSHAWN PLEASANT	Auburn
PR	RYAN NIBLETT	Texas

BOWL PROJECTIONS

Gator: Alabama vs. SMU

Texas: Missouri vs. Oklahoma State

Birmingham: Vanderbilt vs. Tulane

Music City: South Carolina vs. Nebraska

Reliaquest: Florida vs. Penn State

Citrus: Ole Miss vs. Michigan

Liberty: Auburn vs. Kansas State

Duke's Mayo: Tennessee vs. Virginia Tech

College Football Playoff First Round: LSU vs. Miami (Fla.)

College Football Playoff First Round: Oklahoma vs. Texas A&M

Cotton (CFP Quarterfinals): Texas vs. Oregon

Peach (CFP Quarterfinals): Georgia vs. Miami (Fla.)

Rose (CFP Quarterfinals): Oklahoma vs. Ohio State

Sugar (CFP Semifinals): Georgia vs. Texas

National Championship: Georgia vs. Ohio State

JOIN COLLEGE FOOTBALL EXPERT STEVEN LASSAN AT ATHLONSPORTS.COM FOR A LOOK AT SECOND- AND THIRD-TEAM SELECTIONS

COORDINATOR CAROUSEL

ALABAMA
Offense: New: Ryan Grubb; Old: Ryan Grubb, Nick Sheridan, JaMarcus Shephard

ARKANSAS
Offense: New: Tim Cramsey; Old: Bobby Petrino **Defense:** New: Ron Roberts, Deron Wilson; Old: Chris Wilson (interim)

AUBURN
Offense: New: Kodi Burns, Joel Gordon; Old: Derrick Nix **Defense:** New: DJ Durkin, Tim Banks; Old: DJ Durkin

FLORIDA
Offense: New: Buster Faulkner; Old: Russ Callaway **Defense:** New: Brad White; Old: Ron Roberts, Robert Bala, Vinnie Sunseri

KENTUCKY
Offense: New: Joe Sloan; Old: Bush Hamdan **Defense:** New: Jay Bateman; Old: Brad White

LSU
Offense: New: Charlie Weis Jr., Joe Cox; Old: Joe Sloan **Defense:** New: Blake Baker, Chris Kiffin; Old: Blake Baker

MISSISSIPPI STATE
Defense: New: Zach Arnett, Matt Brock Old: Coleman Hutzler

MISSOURI
Offense: New: Chip Lindsey; Old: Kirby Moore **Defense:** New: Corey Batoon, Derek Nicholson; Old: Corey Batoon

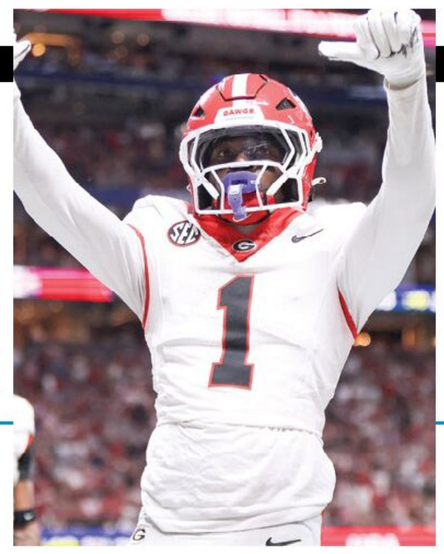
OLE MISS
Offense: New: John David Baker, Cody Woodiel; Old: Charlie Weis Jr. **Defense:** New: Bryan Brown, Marcus Woodson; Old: Pete Golding

SOUTH CAROLINA
Offense: New: Kendal Briles; Old: Mike Furrey (interim) **Defense:** New: Clayton White, Torrian Gray; Old: Clayton White

TENNESSEE
Defense: New: Jim Knowles, Anthony Poindexter; Old: Tim Banks

TEXAS
Defense: New: Will Muschamp, Johnny Nansen; Old: Pete Kwiatkowski

TEXAS A&M
Offense: New: Holmon Wiggins; Old: Collin Klein **Defense:** New: Lyle Hemphill, Elijah Robinson; Old: Jay Bateman



ELLIS ROBINSON IV, GEORGIA
CAM COLEMAN, TEXAS

TOP TRANSFERS

	NAME	POS.	SCHOOL	FORMER SCHOOL
1.	**Cam Coleman**	WR	Texas	Auburn
	The most coveted pass-catcher in the portal will be Arch Manning's top target.			
2.	**Jordan Seaton**	OL	LSU	Colorado
	Seaton is a rare talent who toughens up the Tigers in the trenches.			
3.	**Sam Leavitt**	QB	LSU	Arizona State
	Leavitt is an ideal fit for head coach Lane Kiffin's high-powered offense.			
4.	**Byrum Brown**	QB	Auburn	South Florida
	Brown is a bruiser who led the nation in total offense and total touchdowns in 2025.			
5.	**Princewill Umanmielen**	Edge	LSU	Ole Miss
	Umanmielen's nine sacks put him among the country's top returning pass-rushers.			
6.	**Jacarrius Peak**	OL	South Carolina	NC State
	Peak shores up a line that struggled to protect the quarterback and open rushing lanes.			
7.	**Austin Simmons**	QB	Missouri	Ole Miss
	Still just 20 years old, Simmons gets a second chance at a starting job in the SEC.			
8.	**Kenny Minchey Jr.**	QB	Kentucky	Notre Dame
	Minchey finally gets the opportunity to start for head coach Will Stein's first UK team.			
9.	**Hollywood Smothers**	RB	Texas	NC State
	Smothers brings rare receiving chops and big-play ability to a rebuilt RB room.			
10.	**Rasheem Biles**	LB	Texas	Pitt
	Biles stuffed the stat sheet in the ACC; he'll be the heart of the Longhorns' defense.			

RECRUITING RANKINGS BY SCHOOL

1. Alabama (3)
2. Georgia (5)
3. Texas (8)
4. Texas A&M (9)
5. Tennessee (10)
6. LSU (12)
7. Oklahoma (13)
8. Florida (15)
9. South Carolina (17)
10. Ole Miss (24)
11. Vanderbilt (25)
12. Mississippi State (26)
13. Missouri (34)
14. Auburn (43)
15. Kentucky (54)
16. Arkansas (59)

Rankings per Rivals; National ranking in parentheses

GAMES TO WATCH

Sept. 12	Ohio State at Texas
Sept. 12	Oklahoma at Michigan
Sept. 19	LSU at Ole Miss
Sept. 26	Texas A&M at LSU
Sept. 26	Oklahoma at Georgia
Oct. 10	Georgia at Alabama
Oct. 10	Texas vs. Oklahoma (Dallas)
Nov. 7	Georgia at Ole Miss
Nov. 7	Alabama at LSU
Nov. 14	Texas at LSU
Nov. 27	Texas at Texas A&M
Nov. 28	Auburn at Alabama

TOP 10 RECRUITS

	NAME	POS.	SCHOOL	RATING	NAT. RANK
1.	Jared Curtis	QB	Vanderbilt	★★★★★+	2
2.	Ekene Ogboko	OT	Georgia	★★★★★	9
3.	Lamar Brown	DL	LSU	★★★★★+	10
4.	Julian Walker	EDGE	South Carolina	★★★★★	15
5.	Richard Anderson	DL	LSU	★★★★★	18
6.	EJ Crowell	RB	Alabama	★★★★★+	19
7.	Brandon Arrington	CB	Texas A&M	★★★★★+	20
8.	Jett Thomalla	QB	Alabama	★★★★★	24
9.	Corey Barber Jr.	WR	LSU	★★★★★	28
10.	Richard Wesley	EDGE	Texas	★★★★★	29

Rankings per Rivals; +Consensus 5-star prospect

FROM LEFT: ELLIS ROBINSON IV; JOHN REED-IMAGN IMAGES

ALABAMA CRIMSON TIDE

NATIONAL FORECAST: 15 | SEC PREDICTION: 7 | 2025 RECORD: 11-4, 7-1 SEC

OFFENSE Remember when Ryan Williams was a 17-year-old phenom early in the 2024 season? Now he's a junior and Alabama's most experienced returning offensive player — and he's looking for a fresh start. He's now Ryan Coleman-Williams and wears a new jersey number (1) after a rocky sophomore season marred by one of the nation's highest drop rates.

He'll have a different quarterback throwing him passes this season, with fourth-year Austin Mack and second-year Keelon Russell in a competition to replace Ty Simpson. But it's Alabama's offensive line and running game where the focus lies after the Crimson Tide averaged 3.4 yards per carry in 2025, their third-worst mark since 1970. The offensive line, which lost Kadyn Proctor and Parker Brailsford to the NFL draft, is leaning on 2025 5-star recruit Michael Carroll to anchor a group that dipped heavily into the portal this offseason for help.

Alabama is also sorting through several options in its backfield, which is led by bruising Daniel Hill and added 5-star freshman EJ Crowell.

DEFENSE If you're doing some early scouting for the 2027 NFL Draft, Alabama's defense features at least two players who could be first-round picks next year — outside linebacker Yhonzae Pierre and cornerback Zabien Brown. The decision by Pierre to return for his fourth season bolsters a front that suffered significant losses to the draft or transfer portal.

The Tide's defense was overpowered in a Rose Bowl loss to Indiana, prompting a search for bigger bodies. Oregon's Terrance Green (6-foot-5, 319) and USC's Devan Thompkins (6-foot-5, 298) are the headliners of the portal class, and Alabama needs an impact from Virginia Tech transfer Caleb Woodson at an otherwise inexperienced inside linebacker spot.

In contrast, the secondary remains almost intact, with plenty of experience at safety in Bray Hubbard (fourth year) and Keon Sabb (fifth year).

SPECIALISTS Special teams struggles proved costly last season, including some key missed kicks by Conor Talty. Talty decided to remain at Alabama for a fourth season but is facing competition from Marshall transfer Lorcan Quinn. The Tide will have a new punter — either second-year Alex Asparuhov or FCS North Alabama transfer Adam Watford.

FINAL ANALYSIS Head coach Kalen DeBoer believes that his team took a step forward in his second season, appearing in the SEC Championship Game and winning a College Football Playoff game for the first time since the 2021 season. But a season bookended by embarrassing losses to Florida State in the opener and then to Georgia and Indiana left a sour taste in the mouths of Tide fans, who are expecting better results in Year 3.

2025 RESULTS (11-4, 7-1 SEC)

Aug. 30	at Florida State	L	17-31
Sept. 6	ULM	W	73-0
Sept. 13	Wisconsin	W	38-14
Sept. 27	at Georgia	W	24-21
Oct. 4	Vanderbilt	W	30-14
Oct. 11	at Missouri	W	27-24
Oct. 18	Tennessee	W	37-20
Oct. 25	at South Carolina	W	29-22
Nov. 8	LSU	W	20-9
Nov. 15	Oklahoma	L	21-23
Nov. 22	Eastern Illinois	W	56-0
Nov. 29	at Auburn	W	27-20
Dec. 6	vs. Georgia #	L	7-28
Dec. 19	at Oklahoma %	W	34-24
Jan. 1	vs. Indiana &	L	3-38

#Atlanta %CFB Playoff First Round &Rose Bowl: CFB Playoff Quarterfinal

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	East Carolina
Sept. 12	at Kentucky
Sept. 19	Florida State
Sept. 26	South Carolina
Oct. 3	at Mississippi State
Oct. 10	Georgia
Oct. 17	at Tennessee
Oct. 24	Texas A&M
Nov. 7	at LSU
Nov. 14	at Vanderbilt
Nov. 21	Chattanooga
Nov. 28	Auburn

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	EJ Crowell, RB	★★★★★
2.	Jett Thomalla, QB	★★★★★
3.	Xavier Griffin, LB	★★★★
4.	Jorden Edmonds, CB	★★★★
5.	Jared Doughty, OT	★★★★
6.	Jamarion Matthews, EDGE	★★★★
7.	Cederian Morgan, WR	★★★★
8.	Jireh Edwards, S	★★★★
9.	Chris Booker, IOL	★★★★
10.	Nolan Wilson, DL	★★★★

*Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Kalen DeBoer • Record at School: 20-8 (2 years)
Career Record: 124-20 (11 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Ryan Grubb
Defensive Coordinator: Kane Wommack • Location: Tuscaloosa, Ala.
Stadium: Bryant-Denny Stadium (100,077)

RYAN COLEMAN-WILLIAMS

SCOUTING THE CRIMSON TIDE

"With whoever was going to follow Nick Saban, there was going to be a measuring stick on the toughness or the softness of the program. The run-game statistics do not vouch for toughness. They have to fix that. Losing [QB Ty Simpson] doesn't help that. The top two running backs are gone, three of the top offensive linemen are gone and [WR] Germie Bernard was a special player. Losing all of them doesn't allow people to play you honest so that you can run the ball. People are going to be able to play two-high safeties, create multiple looks and create issues for them. ... Double-digit [point] losses were never a thing [under Saban]. Now, they're a thing. That creates concern, talking points and narratives, which is tough to deal with because the players see it."

— An opposing SEC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (1)

WR	1	**RYAN COLEMAN-WILLIAMS (JR.)**	30	Derek Meadows (So.)
WR	3	Lotzeir Brooks (So.)	5	Noah Rogers* (Jr.)
WR	7	Rico Scott (So.)	8	Cederian Morgan (Fr.)
LT	77	Jackson Lloyd (Fr.)	65	Tyrell Miller (So.)
LG	70	William Sanders (So.)	52	Mal Waldrep Jr. (Fr.)
C	55	Racin Delgatty* (Jr.)	79	Kaden Strayhorn* (Fr.)
RG	64	Michael Carroll (So.)	75	Ethan Fields* (Jr.)
RT	54	Jayvin James* (Jr.)	71	Nick Brooks* (So.)
TE	81	Kaleb Edwards (So.)	40	Josh Ford* (So.)
QB	10	Austin Mack (Jr.)	12	Keelon Russell (Fr.)
RB	4	Daniel Hill (Jr.)	6	Kevin Riley (So.)

DEFENSE (4)

DE	1	Devan Thompkins* (Sr.)	91	Caleb Smith* (Fr.)
DT	99	Terrance Green* (Jr.)	90	London Simmons (So.)
DT	22	Kedrick Bingley-Jones* (Sr.)	94	Edric Hill (Jr.)
OLB	0	**YHONZAE PIERRE (JR.)**	8	Justin Hill (So.)
ILB	7	Caleb Woodson* (Sr.)	4	Luke Metz (So.)
ILB	36	QB Reese (So.)	23	Cayden Jones (Jr.)
CB	2	**ZABIEN BROWN (JR.)**	28	Carmelo O'Neal* (Jr.)
CB	5	Dijon Lee Jr. (So.)	16	Jorden Edmonds (Fr.)
HUSKY	6	Red Morgan (Jr.)	21	Dre Kirkpatrick Jr. (Jr.)
S	3	**KEON SABB (SR.)**	13	Ivan Taylor (So.)
S	18	**BRAY HUBBARD (SR.)**	12	Zavier Mincey (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	31	Conor Talty (Jr.)	KR	3	Lotzeir Brooks (So.)
P	32	Alex Asparuhov (Fr.)	PR	1	Ryan Coleman-Williams (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

DAVID LEONG-IMAGN IMAGES

KJ JACKSON

SCOTT WACHTER-IMAGN IMAGES

SCOUTING THE RAZORBACKS

"They're not considered a sleeping giant. Ryan Silverfield is a great coach who might have taken the wrong Power 4 job at the wrong time. If you look at their SEC schedule, the nine teams that they have to play are pretty daunting, and then you add Utah. That doesn't set up for Year 1 success. In this day and age, if you don't have Year 1 success, narratives get forced upon you that you've gotta find a way to shake. ... [Silverfield] has always had excellent offenses. They put a lot on their quarterback to make checks and reads. He's very calm on game day, and very, very bright. He understands the ending of games and how to handle those situations with timeouts."

— An opposing SEC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)

WR	**3**	**CJ BROWN (JR.)**	8	Donovan Faupel* (Sr.)
WR	4	Ismael Cisse (Jr.)	9	Jamari Hawkins* (Sr.)
WR	6	Chris Marshall* (Sr.)	1	Courtney Crutchfield (So.)
LT	75	Kavion Broussard* (So.)	74	Terence Roberson Jr.* (So.)
LG	71	Malachi Breland* (Jr.)	51	Davion Weatherspoon* (Sr.)
C	**52**	**CADEN KITLER (SR.)**	53	Kash Courtney (Fr.)
RG	**50**	**KOBE BRANHAM (SO.)**	73	Brooks Edmonson (Sr.)
RT	64	Bryant Williams* (Sr.)	54	Adam Hawkes* (So.)
TE	**83**	**JADEN PLATT (JR.)**	85	Ty Lockwood* (Jr.)
QB	7	KJ Jackson (So.)	2	AJ Hill* (Fr.)
RB	0	Braylen Russell (Jr.)	5	Sutton Smith* (Sr.)

DEFENSE (2)

DE	**97**	**QUINCY RHODES JR. (SR.)**	88	Xadavien Sims* (So.)
NT	92	David Oke (Sr.)	28	Trajen Odom* (Fr.)
DT	0	Hunter Osborne* (Jr.)	91	Carlon Jones* (So.)
JACK	9	Charlie Collins (Jr.)	35	Steven Soles Jr.* (Jr.)
MLB	**7**	**BRADLEY SHAW (JR.)**	42	Jeremy Evans* (Sr.)
WLB	25	Ja'Quavion Smith* (Jr.)	10	Wyatt Simmons (So.)
CB	20	Jahiem Johnson* (Jr.)	2	Shelton Lewis* (Jr.)
CB	4	La'khi Roland* (Jr.)	17	DJ Hairston Jr.* (So.)
STAR	6	Khmori House* (Jr.)	13	Carter Stoutmire* (Sr.)
S	24	Miguel Mitchell (Sr.)	14	Kyeaure Magloire* (Sr.)
S	1	Christian Harrison* (Sr.)	22	Tay Lockett (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	30	Max Gilbert* (Jr.)	**KR** 5	Sutton Smith* (Sr.)
P	37	Gavin Rush (Fr.)	**PR** 5	Sutton Smith* (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

ARKANSAS RAZORBACKS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 51 | SEC PREDICTION: 16 | 2025 RECORD: 2-10, 0-8 SEC

OFFENSE Can either of the two quarterbacks — returnee KJ Jackson or Memphis transfer AJ Hill — help return the Arkansas Razorbacks respectability in the rugged SEC? First-year head coach Ryan Silverfield is banking on the pair, who have scant major-college experience. Jackson looked more effective in decision-making, mechanics and with the schemes during spring drills, although Hill has more background in the system imported by Silverfield and offensive coordinator Tim Cramsey.

Returning thumper Braylen Russell will compete with Memphis transfer Sutton Smith for reps at tailback. CJ Brown, Ismael Cisse, Jamari Hawkins and the talented but well-traveled Chris Marshall will lead the receiving corps, and Jaden Platt returns at tight end.

Center Caden Kitler and guard Kobe Branham are back on the interior of the offensive front, and the Hogs added large transfers in tackles Kavion Broussard (Ohio) and Bryant Williams (Louisiana) and guard Malachi Breland (Memphis) to form a potential starting five.

DEFENSE End Quincy Rhodes Jr. had a breakout year in 2025, while linebacker Bradley Shaw and safety Miguel Mitchell have logged significant time. Otherwise, there are plenty of newcomers for defensive coordinator Ron Roberts in his base three-down scheme.

The Razorbacks expect big things from Virginia transfer tackle Hunter Osborne and nose David Oke, while transfers Xadavien Sims (Oregon), Carlon Jones (USC) and Trajen Odom (Ohio State) and elite freshmen Danny Beale III and Anthony Kennedy Jr. will help populate the front. The hybrid "Jack" role should be shared among Charlie Collins and others.

Shaw, a solid contributor last season, and Buffalo transfer Ja'Quavion Smith have taken the most linebacker reps with the first unit.

Khmori House has flashed the potential for a major impact at "Star." Finding depth at cornerback and safety was a priority for the new staff. Transfers Jahiem Johnson, La'Khi Roland, Shelton Lewis, DJ Hairston Jr. and Braydon Lee are in position for the most time at cornerback. At safety, Mitchell has received frequent reps with Carter Stoutmire (Colorado transfer), Christian Harrison (Cincinnati transfer) and others.

SPECIALISTS The Razorbacks have no returning players in the kicking game, but placekicker Max Gilbert, punter Gavin Rush and return specialist Sutton Smith give the coaching staff a potentially solid core.

FINAL ANALYSIS The Razorbacks have a ton of ground to make up, and Silverfield thinks a drastic improvement in turnover margin and a stronger measure of team cohesion will help. A six-win season in Silverfield's debut, given the schedule, would display significant improvement.

2025 RESULTS (2-10, 0-8 SEC)

Aug. 30	Alabama A&M	W	52-7
Sept. 6	vs. Arkansas State #	W	56-14
Sept. 13	at Ole Miss	L	35-41
Sept. 20	at Memphis	L	31-32
Sept. 27	Notre Dame	L	13-56
Oct. 11	at Tennessee	L	31-34
Oct. 18	Texas A&M	L	42-45
Oct. 25	Auburn	L	24-33
Nov. 1	Mississippi State	L	35-38
Nov. 15	at LSU	L	22-23
Nov. 22	at Texas	L	37-52
Nov. 29	Missouri	L	17-31

#Little Rock, AR

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	North Alabama
Sept. 12	at Utah
Sept. 19	Georgia
Sept. 26	Tulsa
Oct. 3	at Texas A&M
Oct. 10	Tennessee
Oct. 17	at Vanderbilt
Oct. 31	Missouri
Nov. 7	at Auburn
Nov. 14	South Carolina
Nov. 21	at Texas
Nov. 28	LSU

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Hank Hendrix, QB	★★★★
2.	TJ Hodges, RB	★★★
3.	Jakore Smith, LB	★★★
4.	Danny Beale III, DL	★★★
5.	Anthony Kennedy Jr., DL	★★★
6.	Dequane Prevo, WR	★★★
7.	Colton Yarbrough, EDGE	★★★
8.	Jalon Copeland, CB	★★★
9.	Kyndrick Williams, S	★★★
10.	Brandon Ford, CB	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Ryan Silverfield • Record at School: First Season • Career Record: 50-25 (6+ years) • Offensive Coordinator: Tim Cramsey
Defensive Coordinators: Ron Roberts, Deron Wilson • Location: Fayetteville, Ark. • Stadium: Donald W. Reynolds Razorback Stadium (76,212)

AUBURN TIGERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 34 | SEC PREDICTION: 12 | 2025 RECORD: 5-7, 1-7 SEC

OFFENSE Auburn hired head coach Alex Golesh from South Florida to spark an offense that never got on track under former head coach Hugh Freeze and hasn't finished in the top 50 in scoring nationally since 2019. Golesh brought in key staff members and offensive performers from USF, including quarterback Byrum Brown, center Cole Best and wide receivers Chas Nimrod, Keshaun Singleton and Jeremiah Koger.

Brown became an elite dual threat under Golesh, eclipsing 3,000 passing yards and 800 rushing yards in 2023 and '25 (he missed half the 2024 season with a lower-leg injury). Now he must deliver in the SEC.

Wide receiver projects well with the USF imports, as Nimrod and others stood out in the spring. Auburn also has ball-carrying options with leading rusher Jeremiah Cobb returning and talented Baylor transfer Bryson Washington arriving. Transfers Jake Johnson (North Carolina) and Jonathan Echols (South Florida) will compete at tight end.

Best, an all-league performer last year, anchors a transfer-heavy offensive line that also includes James Madison tackle Jo Simmons.

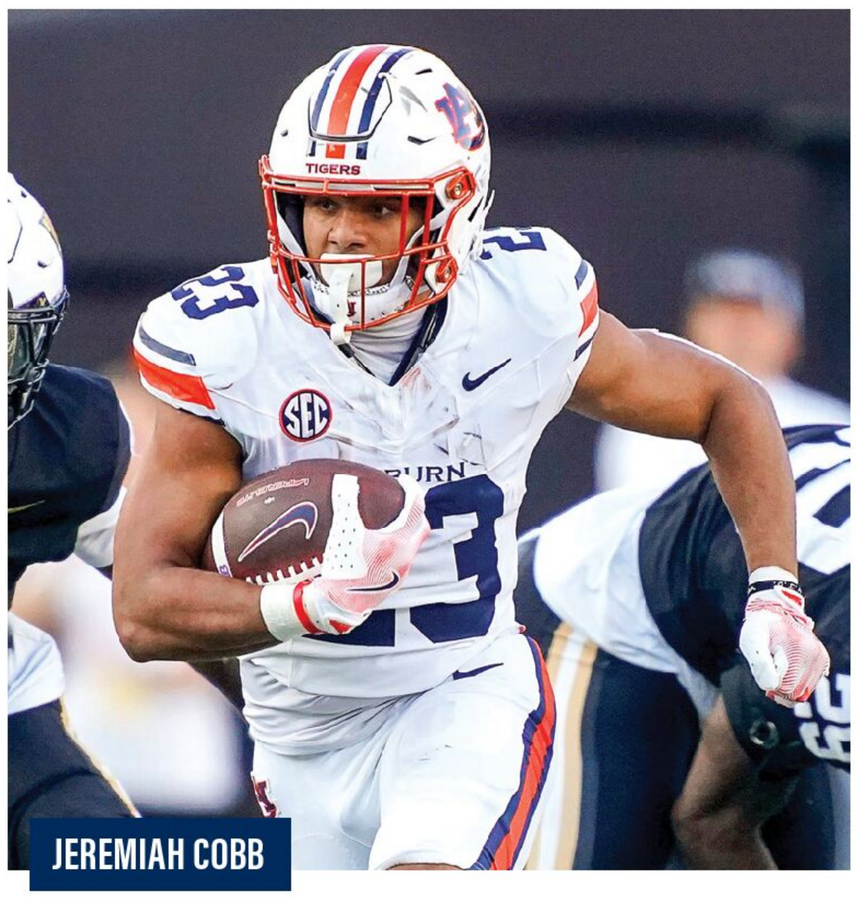
DEFENSE Golesh retained defensive coordinator DJ Durkin, a candidate for the head-coaching role after serving as interim, to stabilize a defense that showed promise but remains young in spots. Durkin has a centerpiece in linebacker Xavier Atkins, a first-team All-SEC selection with nine sacks, 17 tackles for a loss and two forced fumbles in 2025.

Elijah Melendez will complement Atkins, and Auburn has depth at safety with returners Eric Winters, Sylvester Smith and AnQuon Fegans. Cornerback is more of an unknown, although UCLA transfer Andre Jordan Jr. should help. "He's been really impressive," Golesh says of Jordan.

The defensive front is transfer-heavy with Cody Sigler (Arkansas State), Da'Shawn Womack (Ole Miss), Nate Johnson (Missouri), Saint Farrior (Appalachian State) and Walter Mathis Jr. (LSU) joining sophomores Jourdin Crawford, Jared Smith and Darrion Smith.

SPECIALISTS Placekicker Alex McPherson enters his senior season as a Lou Groza Award candidate; he holds Auburn's career record for field-goal percentage (88.9). Punter Hudson Kaak enters his second year as the starter, and primary kickoff returner Rayshawn Pleasant is also back.

FINAL ANALYSIS Golesh is relying on imports to get Auburn on track. Brown is certainly capable, and if a remade offensive line holds up, the Tigers should re-enter the top 50 nationally for scoring. If the defensive line transfers hit and returning players keep progressing, that unit could flourish, too. "You're meshing almost two teams into one, and you're looking for leadership in every imaginable way," Golesh says.



JEREMIAH COBB

SCOUTING THE TIGERS

"Honestly, [Alex Golesh] is a pretty good fit. You see him paired with [defensive coordinator] DJ [Durkin], and he's a grinder. I see how the system could be attractive. You bring your quarterback with you, and there's not a big learning curve there. I could see them having success. ... They were really good on defense last year. They were the best defense that we saw. You add some offense with it, and they can be pretty good. I sense that there's gonna be a mentality to be who they are and not conform to the past and how things have been run there. ... Teams that play them early, there's gonna be a surprise with how efficient they are with the guys that have been in that system."

— An opposing SEC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (1)					
WR	5	Chas Nimrod* (Sr.)	13	Kory Pettigrew* (Fr.)
WR	11	Keshaun Singleton* (Jr.)	6	Bryce Cain (So.)
WR	4	Jeremiah Koger* (So.)	8	Christian Neptune* (So.)
LT	65	Stanton Ramil* (Jr.)	71	Tai Buster (Fr.)
LG	52	Deryc Plazz* (So.)	76	Jack Leyrer* (Sr.)
C	72	Cole Best* (Sr.)	51	Kail Ellis (So.)
RG	56	Cole Skinner* (Sr.)	74	Jacobe' Ward (Fr.)
RT	79	Jo Simmons* (Sr.)	77	Wilson Zierer (Fr.)
TE	19	Jake Johnson* (Sr.)	1	Jonathan Echols* (So.)
QB	17	Byrum Brown* (Sr.)	3	Locklan Hewlett* (Fr.)
RB	**23**	**JEREMIAH COBB (SR.)**	30	Bryson Washington* (Jr.)
DEFENSE (1)				
DE	90	Nate Johnson* (Sr.)	11	Darrion Smith (So.)
DT	94	Cody Sigler* (Sr.)	99	Saint Farrior* (Jr.)
DT	10	Walter Mathis Jr.* (So.)	35	Dallas Walker IV (Sr.)
DE	15	Da'Shawn Womack* (Sr.)	41	Jared Smith (So.)
LB	**17**	**XAVIER ATKINS (JR.)**	44	Adam Balogoun-Ali (Fr.)
LB	9	Elijah Melendez (So.)	51	Michael Matthews-Canty* (Jr.)
LB	16	Bryce Deas (So.)	6	Demarcus Riddick (Jr.)
CB	22	Andre Jordan Jr.* (Sr.)	33	Kamari Todd* (So.)
CB	4	Rayshawn Pleasant (Sr.)	14	Shamar Arnoux* (So.)
S	23	Fred Gaskin III* (Jr.)	0	Sylvester Smith (Jr.)
S	5	Eric Winters (So.)	3	AnQuon Fegans (So.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	38	Alex McPherson (Sr.)	KR	4	Rayshawn Pleasant (Sr.)
P	14	Hudson Kaak (Sr.)	PR	6	Bryce Cain (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

2025 RESULTS (5-7, 1-7 SEC)

Aug. 29	at Baylor	W	38-24
Sept. 6	Ball State	W	42-3
Sept. 13	South Alabama	W	31-15
Sept. 20	at Oklahoma	L	17-24
Sept. 27	at Texas A&M	L	10-16
Oct. 11	Georgia	L	10-20
Oct. 18	Missouri (ot)	L	17-23
Oct. 25	at Arkansas	W	33-24
Nov. 1	Kentucky	L	3-10
Nov. 8	at Vanderbilt (ot)	L	38-45
Nov. 22	Mercer	W	62-17
Nov. 29	Alabama	L	20-27

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	vs. Baylor #
Sept. 12	Southern Miss
Sept. 19	Florida
Sept. 26	Vanderbilt
Oct. 3	at Tennessee
Oct. 17	at Georgia
Oct. 24	LSU
Oct. 31	at Ole Miss
Nov. 7	Arkansas
Nov. 14	at Mississippi State
Nov. 21	Samford
Nov. 28	at Alabama

#Atlanta

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Brady Marchese, WR	★★★★
2.	Jaquez Wilkes, EDGE	★★★★
3.	Wilson Zierer, OT	★★★★
4.	Shadarius Toodle, LB	★★★
5.	Tavian Branch, DL	★★★
6.	Damonte Tabb, S	★★★
7.	Adam Balogoun-Ali, LB	★★★
8.	Brian Williams Jr., WR	★★★
9.	DJ Broughton Jr., TE	★★★
10.	Mykall Lundy-Foster, IOL	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Alex Golesh • Record at School: First Season • Career Record: 23-15 (3 years) • Offensive Coordinators: Kodi Burns, Joel Gordon • Defensive Coordinators: DJ Durkin, Tim Banks • Location: Auburn, Ala. • Stadium: Jordan-Hare Stadium (88,043)

ANDREW NELLES / THE TENNESSEAN

JADAN BAUGH

SCOUTING THE GATORS

"[Jon Sumrall] has hired extremely well. It feels like they've really opened up the checkbook. ... The question marks would still be along the offensive line and quarterback. They got [Aaron Philo] from Georgia Tech, who knows the system, but in this league, it's about making critical throws on third down and in the red zone, and that's yet to be seen. ... Hiring [offensive coordinator] Buster Faulkner was a home-run move. Then getting Philo to come with him, and getting [Auburn wide receiver transfer] Eric Singleton, too. ... Faulkner can coach offensive football. It is such a departure from what anybody in the SEC does offensively, and they're gonna have a couple games where they have an advantage because everything is so new schematically."

— An opposing SEC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)					
WR	6	Dallas Wilson (Fr.)	5	Micah Mays Jr.* (Jr.)
WR	1	Vernell Brown III (So.)	3	Bailey Stockton* (Jr.)
WR	2	Eric Singleton Jr.* (Sr.)	4	TJ Abrams (So.)
LT	66	Emeka Ugorji* (So.)	55	TJ Dice Jr. (Fr.)
LG	**77**	**KNIJEAH HARRIS (SR.)**	61	G'Nivre Carr (Fr.)
C	52	Harrison Moore* (Jr.)	50	Jason Zandamela (So.)
RG	67	TJ Shanahan Jr.* (Jr.)	53	Bryce Lovett (Jr.)
RT	**63**	**CADEN JONES (JR.)**	64	Eagan Boyer* (So.)
TE	15	Luke Harpring* (So.)	7	Amir Jackson (So.)
QB	12	Aaron Philo* (So.)	9	Tramell Jones Jr. (Fr.)
RB	**13**	**JADAN BAUGH (JR.)**	20	Duke Clark (Fr.)
DEFENSE (3)				
DE	11	LJ McCray (So.)	24	Kamran James (Sr.)
DT	91	Jeramiah McCloud (So.)	97	Joseph Mbatchou (So.)
DT	90	Brendan Bett (Jr.)	99	Emmanuel Oyebadejo* (Sr.)
JACK	0	Jayden Woods (So.)	14	KJ Ford (Fr.)
LB	8	Aaron Chiles (Jr.)	50	Malik Morris (Fr.)
LB	**5**	**MYLES GRAHAM (JR.)**	7	Ty Jackson (So.)
LB	**29**	**JADEN ROBINSON (SR.)**	44	Myles Johnson (So.)
CB	12	Ben Hanks III (Fr.)	25	Cormani McClain (Jr.)
CB	27	Dijon Johnson (Jr.)	6	J'Vari Flowers (So.)
S	**1**	**BRYCE THORNTON (SR.)**	2	Lagonza Hayward (So.)
S	33	DJ Coleman* (Sr.)	10	Cam Dooley* (Jr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	91	Patrick Durkin* (So.)	KR	1	Vernell Brown III (So.)
P	38	Alec Clark* (Jr.)	PR	24	London Montgomery* (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

ALAN YOUNGBLOOD/GAINESVILLE SUN

FLORIDA GATORS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 26 | SEC PREDICTION: 9 | 2025 RECORD: 4-8, 2-6 SEC

OFFENSE Florida returns one of the SEC's top tailbacks in Jadan Baugh, along with potential rising stars in receivers Vernell Brown III and Dallas Wilson. New head coach Jon Sumrall also inherited an offense that managed only one touchdown in five different losses. Sumrall hired innovative offensive coordinator Buster Faulkner from Georgia Tech to restore production and excitement at a program accustomed to both during its heyday. Faulkner brought quarterback Aaron Philo, the Yellow Jackets' former backup, to compete with returning redshirt freshman Tramell Jones Jr. for the starting job that opened up when DJ Lagway transferred to Baylor.

Receiver Eric Singleton Jr., who played for Faulkner in 2023-24 at Tech, arrives from Auburn to headline a wave of portal additions. The group includes spring game standout Micah Mays Jr. (Wake Forest) and Cincinnati tailback Evan Pryor, a home-run threat as a runner and receiver.

Up front, transfers TJ Shanahan Jr. (Penn State/Texas A&M), Harrison Moore (Georgia Tech) and Emeka Ugorji (Stanford), along with three-year starting guard Knijeah Harris, are key to building a reliable line.

DEFENSE Florida could field its best front seven since 2019, when the Gators allowed just 15.5 points per game. Linebackers Myles Graham, Jaden Robinson and Aaron Chiles, edge rusher Jayden Woods, tackle Brendan Bett and end Kamran James anchor a talented, experienced group capable of setting the tone defensively in the 3-4 scheme that defensive coordinator Brad White brought from Kentucky.

End LJ McCray has star potential but must stay healthy after logging only four snaps in 2025. Tackles Joseph Mbatchou and Jeramiah McCloud look poised for Year 2 jumps after flashing as freshmen. Jacksonville State transfer Emmanuel Oyebadejo adds size (6-foot-6, 303) and athleticism.

The secondary remains less certain. Redshirt freshman Ben Hanks III impressed in the spring, while veterans Dijon Johnson and Cormani McClain must find consistency. Safety Bryce Thornton is a proven playmaker, while Baylor transfer DJ Coleman adds needed physicality.

SPECIALISTS Patrick Durkin, who made 25-of-28 field goals in 2025, and Alec Clark (46.5 yards per punt) followed Sumrall from Tulane. Brown adds a dangerous return element.

FINAL ANALYSIS Sumrall's teams reached the conference title game two times apiece at Troy and Tulane and won at least 11 games three times. He brought strength coach Rusty Whitt, a former Green Beret, to instill toughness and culture. Florida's fourth head coach since 2017, Sumrall faces roster holes and NIL challenges, but if he's the right hire, the 43-year-old could awaken a program he called "a sleeping giant."

2025 RESULTS (4-8, 2-6 SEC)

Aug. 30	Long Island	W	55-0
Sept. 6	South Florida	L	16-18
Sept. 13	at LSU	L	10-20
Sept. 20	at Miami (Fla.)	L	7-26
Oct. 4	Texas	W	29-21
Oct. 11	at Texas A&M	L	17-34
Oct. 18	Mississippi State	W	23-21
Nov. 1	vs. Georgia #	L	20-24
Nov. 8	at Kentucky	L	7-38
Nov. 15	at Ole Miss	L	24-34
Nov. 22	Tennessee	L	11-31
Nov. 29	Florida State	W	40-21

#Jacksonville, FL

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	Florida Atlantic
Sept. 12	Campbell
Sept. 19	at Auburn
Sept. 26	Ole Miss
Oct. 3	at Missouri
Oct. 10	South Carolina
Oct. 17	at Texas
Oct. 31	vs. Georgia #
Nov. 7	Oklahoma
Nov. 14	at Kentucky
Nov. 21	Vanderbilt
Nov. 28	at Florida State

#Atlanta

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	CJ Bronaugh, CB	★★★★
2.	Tyler Chukuyem, OT	★★★★
3.	Davian Groce, WR	★★★★
4.	KJ Ford, EDGE	★★★★
5.	Justin Williams, WR	★★★★
6.	Dylan Purter, S	★★★★
7.	JaReylan McCoy, DL	★★★★
8.	Will Griffin, QB	★★★★
9.	Heze Kent, OT	★★★
10.	Kaiden Hall, S	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Jon Sumrall • Record at School: First Season • Career Record: 43-12 (4 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Buster Faulkner • Defensive Coordinator: Brad White • Location: Gainesville, Fla. • Stadium: Ben Hill Griffin Stadium (88,548)

GEORGIA BULLDOGS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 2 | SEC PREDICTION: 1 | 2025 RECORD: 12-2, 7-1 SEC

OFFENSE It's Year 2 for quarterback Gunner Stockton. Last season saw him serve as a difference-maker in a few big Georgia wins, but it also saw him hamstring the offense at different points when he wasn't at his best. Stockton has to shrink the gap between his ceiling and his floor.

The backfield is loaded. Nate Frazier returns as the team's lead back. Chauncey Bowens, Dante Dowdell and Dwight Phillips Jr. have each shown the ability to generate big plays.

At receiver, the Bulldogs grabbed Isiah Canion (Georgia Tech) out of the transfer portal for experience, but they'll lean on a talented, explosive group of youngsters, including Talyn Taylor and Landon Roldan. London Humphreys brings big-game experience. A deep, extremely talented group of tight ends will also carry some of the load.

The offensive line brings back four players with significant experience. True freshman Zykie Helton and 6-foot-10 junior Jahzare Jackson also stepped up this spring. Those two are vying for the No. 5 and No. 6 spots in the trenches, with Juan Gaston ready to play right guard or right tackle.

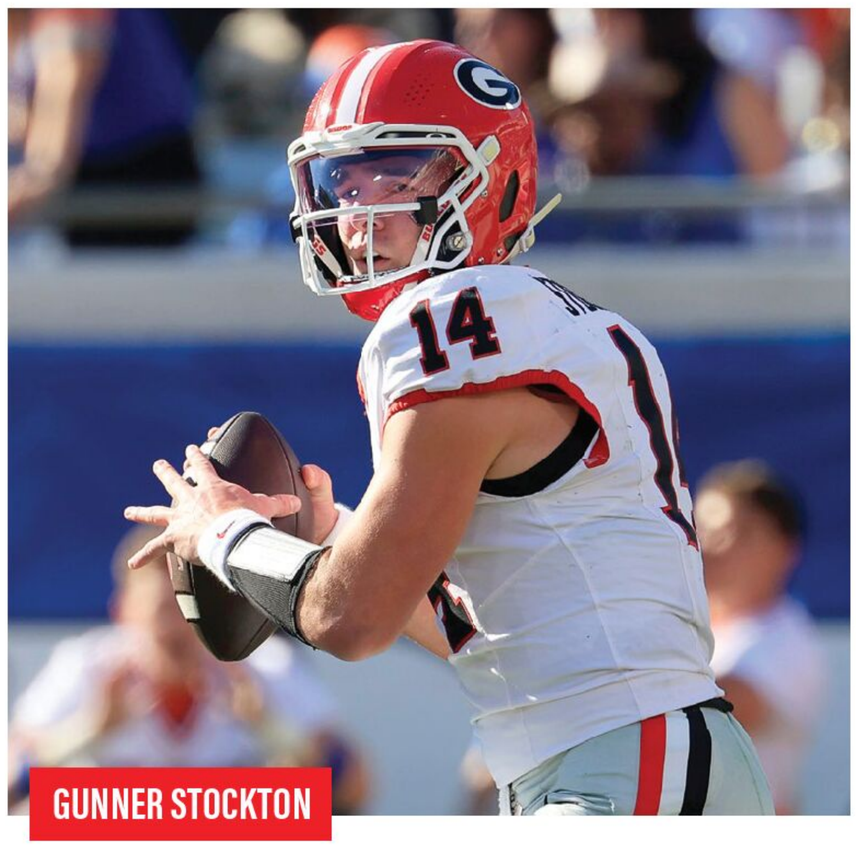
DEFENSE The Bulldogs bring back 21 defenders who played meaningful action either at UGA or another program last season. Fourth-year junior Xzavier McLeod and ultra-talented sophomore Elijah Griffin anchor the defensive front.

The pass rush is a priority, and that's where edge Quintavius Johnson is looking to take a big step forward. Georgia brought in pass-rush technician Larry Knight as outside linebackers coach to get the best out of Johnson and redshirt freshman Chase Linton, who had a breakout spring.

Inside linebacker features the three-headed monster of Raylen Wilson, Chris Cole and Justin Williams. UGA is set at cornerback, led by Ellis Robinson IV, but the safety spot alongside KJ Bolden is up for grabs. Clemson transfer Khalil Barnes figures to start either there or at the Star/nickel spot.

SPECIALISTS Drew Miller, a redshirt sophomore, is a big, strong-legged punter who is praised for his hang time and work ethic. Peyton Woodring is going into his fourth season as placekicker. He is as reliable as they come, including in big moments. Wide receiver Sacovie White-Helton is aiming to replace Zachariah Branch as the punt returner.

FINAL ANALYSIS The Bulldogs were young a season ago, relying on a lot of second- and third-year players. That group is now a year older, and as we've seen since 2019, experienced teams thrive in this era of college football. But the Bulldogs will go only as far as Stockton will take them.



GUNNER STOCKTON

SCOUTING THE BULLDOGS

"Do they still have the depth that they had in 2020? I think the answer to that is 'no.' Those backups or third-string guys are playing for Missouri or Georgia Tech. I don't know that their process is the same. I don't know that their depth is the same. Are those elite programs getting better? Probably not. They have a thinner margin for error. ... They'll look really similar to how they looked this past year. I think they'll be a playoff team, but I don't know that they're an elite SEC team like the ones you saw in the early 2020s. What they seek to be offensively is 'Don't blow the game. Let's run the ball. Let's let the quarterback get in the rhythm.' ... Their confidence in [QB Gunner Stockton] throwing the ball will determine how aggressive they are."

— An opposing SEC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR	6	Isiah Canion* (Jr.)	8	Landon Roldan (So.)
WR	1	Talyn Taylor (Fr.)	16	London Humphreys (Sr.)
WR	0	Sacovie White-Helton (So.)	13	Tyler J. Williams (Fr.)
LT	**71**	**EARNEST GREENE III (SR.)**	72	Ekene Ogboko (Fr.)
LG	**63**	**DONTRELL GLOVER (SO.)**	70	Daniel Calhoun (So.)
C	**74**	**DREW BOBO (SR.)**	50	Cortez Smith (Fr.)
RG	55	Zykie Helton (Fr.)	52	Michael Uini (So.)
RT	73	Juan Gaston (So.)	64	Jahzare Jackson (Jr.)
TE	**7**	**LAWSON LUCKIE (SR.)**	10	Elyiss Williams (So.)
QB	**14**	**GUNNER STOCKTON (SR.)**	12	Ryan Puglisi (So.)
RB	**3**	**NATE FRAZIER (JR.)**	5	Chauncey Bowens (So.)

DEFENSE (8)

DE	**0**	**GABE HARRIS JR. (SR.)**	99	Joseph Jonah-Ajonye (So.)
NT	**94**	**XZAVIER MCLEOD (JR.)**	95	Nnamdi Ogboko (So.)
DT	90	Elijah Griffin (So.)	**44**	**JORDAN HALL (JR.)**
OLB	**3**	**QUINTAVIUS JOHNSON (JR.)**	85	Chase Linton (Fr.)
ILB	9	Chris Cole (Jr.)	19	Justin Williams (Jr.)
ILB	**5**	**RAYLEN WILSON (SR.)**	10	Zayden Walker (So.)
CB	**1**	**ELLIS ROBINSON IV (SO.)**	26	Gentry Williams* (Sr.)
CB	15	Demello Jones (Jr.)	24	Braylon Conley* (So.)
STAR	7	Khalil Barnes* (Sr.)	23	Tyriq Green (Fr.)
S	**4**	**KJ BOLDEN (JR.)**	12	Ja'Marley Riddle* (Jr.)
S	27	Rasean Dinkins (So.)	**31**	**KYRON JONES (JR.)**

SPECIALISTS

K	91	Peyton Woodring (Sr.)	KR	1 Talyn Taylor (Fr.)
P	90	Drew Miller (So.)	PR	0 Sacovie White-Helton (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

2025 RESULTS (12-2, 7-1 SEC)

Aug. 30	Marshall	W	45-7
Sept. 6	Austin Peay	W	28-6
Sept. 13	at Tennessee (ot)	W	44-41
Sept. 27	Alabama	L	21-24
Oct. 4	Kentucky	W	35-14
Oct. 11	at Auburn	W	20-10
Oct. 18	Ole Miss	W	43-35
Nov. 1	vs. Florida #	W	24-20
Nov. 8	at Mississippi State	W	41-21
Nov. 15	Texas	W	35-10
Nov. 22	Charlotte	W	35-3
Nov. 28	at Georgia Tech	W	16-9
Dec. 6	vs. Alabama %	W	28-7
Jan. 1	vs. Ole Miss &	L	34-39

#Jacksonville, FL %Atlanta
&Sugar Bowl: CFB Playoff Quarterfinal

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	Tennessee State
Sept. 12	Western Kentucky
Sept. 19	at Arkansas
Sept. 26	Oklahoma
Oct. 3	Vanderbilt
Oct. 10	at Alabama
Oct. 17	Auburn
Oct. 31	vs. Florida #
Nov. 7	at Ole Miss
Nov. 14	Missouri
Nov. 21	at South Carolina
Nov. 28	Georgia Tech

#Atlanta

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Ekene Ogboko, OT	★★★★★
2.	Craig Dandridge, WR	★★★★
3.	Kaiden Prothro, TE	★★★★
4.	Justice Fitzpatrick, CB	★★★★
5.	Khamari Brooks, EDGE	★★★★
6.	Tyriq Green, S	★★★★
7.	Jordan Smith, S	★★★★
8.	Caden Harris, CB	★★★★
9.	Tyreek Jemison, IOL	★★★★
10.	Valdin Sone, DL	★★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Kirby Smart • Record at School: 117-21 (10 years)
Career Record: 117-21 (10 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Mike Bobo
Defensive Coordinator: Glenn Schumann • Location: Athens, Ga.
Stadium: Sanford Stadium (93,033)

COREY PERRINE/FLORIDA TIMES-UNION]

TY BRYANT

SCOUTING THE WILDCATS

"With the talent base that [new head coach Will Stein] inherited, the only thing I wonder about is the fact that he had more talent than everybody else at Oregon for most of the games. It'll be interesting to see him going from one of the haves to one of the have-nots and how that's going to transition while still not losing your enthusiasm, your connection with the players and all of those kinds of things. ... I haven't seen a ton of [Notre Dame QB transfer Kenny Minchey], but I've heard good things about him as an athlete and as a person. He clearly has legit talent, and those guys are hard to find."

— An opposing SEC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (1)

WR	4	Nic Anderson* (Sr.)	5	Ja'Kayden Ferguson* (So.)
WR	7	DJ Miller (So.)	17	Hardley Gilmore IV (Jr.)
WR	6	Shane Carr* (Jr.)	19	Kenny Darby (Fr.)
LT	53	Lance Heard* (Sr.)	67	Mark Robinson* (Jr.)
LG	73	Olaus Alinen* (Jr.)	57	Jordan Knox* (Jr.)
C	72	Coleton Price* (Sr.)	79	Jay Clark (Fr.)
RG	77	Tegra Tshabola* (Sr.)	55	Aba Selm (So.)
RT	71	Malachi Wood (Jr.)	50	Max Anderson* (So.)
TE	**81**	**WILLIE RODRIGUEZ (JR.)**	87	Henry Boyer (Sr.)
QB	3	Kenny Minchey* (Jr.)	14	Brennen Ward (So.)
RB	1	CJ Baxter* (Jr.)	2	Jovantae Barnes* (Sr.)

DEFENSE (3)

DE	**90**	**MI'QUISE HUMPHREY-GRACE (SR.)**	6	Ahmad Breaux* (Jr.)
DT	7	Jamarrion Harkless* (Jr.)	93	Kalen Edwards (So.)
DT	94	Tavion Gadson (Jr.)	91	Jaden Williams (Sr.)
OLB	**2**	**SAM GREENE (JR.)**	8	Lorenzo Cowan (So.)
ILB	22	Grant Godfrey (Jr.)	25	Tavion Wallace* (So.)
ILB	0	Elijah Barnes* (Fr.)	44	Antwan Smith (Jr.)
CB	20	Terhyon Nichols (Jr.)	30	Grant Grayton (So.)
CB	12	Hasaan Sykes* (Jr.)	21	Nasir Addison (Sr.)
NB	3	Aaron Gates* (Jr.)	24	Jaden Smith (So.)
S	**14**	**TY BRYANT (SR.)**	13	Cyrus Reyes* (Jr.)
S	5	Jordan Castell* (Sr.)	16	Jesse Anderson III* (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	91	Jacob Kauwe (So.)	KR	19 Kenny Darby (Fr.)
P	48	Thomas O'Hara* (Jr.)	PR	4 Martels Carter Jr. (Fr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

JORDAN PRATHER-IMAGN IMAGES

KENTUCKY WILDCATS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 49 | SEC PREDICTION: 15 | 2025 RECORD: 5-7, 2-6 SEC

OFFENSE When a school fires its head coach, it usually searches for a contrasting style. That is the case for Kentucky, which replaced Mark Stoops with Oregon offensive coordinator Will Stein to bring a more exciting attack to Lexington.

Former Notre Dame backup Kenny Minchey will start at quarterback. The staff added three offensive line starters with multiple years of power-conference starting experience. Former starters at Oklahoma and Texas will be among the featured options at running back and wide receiver.

If the staff's gamble on Minchey, who narrowly lost the Notre Dame starting job a year ago but has played few meaningful snaps in three college seasons, pays off, the offense could be Kentucky's best in years. That quest would be helped with breakout seasons from returning pass-catchers DJ Miller and Willie Rodriguez.

Health will be a key storyline to watch since running backs CJ Baxter and Jovantae Barnes and wide receiver Nic Anderson all showed talent at their previous schools but lacked recent production due to injuries.

DEFENSE Stein hired former Texas A&M defensive coordinator Jay Bateman, promising him more autonomy. Bateman's scheme promises more pass-rushing opportunities and press-man coverage.

The new staff kept many of the key defenders from 2025, including linemen Mi'Quise Humphrey-Grace and Tavion Gadson, edge rusher Sam Greene, linebacker Grant Godfrey, cornerback Terhyon Nichols and safety Ty Bryant. Kentucky added eight transfers in the front seven but chose to pursue potential rather than proven production at linebacker, with the additions of former blue-chippers Elijah Barnes and Tavion Wallace.

Florida transfers Jordan Castell and Aaron Gates will strengthen the secondary, but cornerback is a position to watch. Injuries decimated the position last season, giving younger players game experience before they were ready. The new staff will hope that experience helps in 2026, along with the addition of FCS Western Carolina transfer Hasaan Sykes.

SPECIALISTS Placekicker Jacob Kauwe should be a weapon for the Wildcats. Fans were glad to see the coaches sign Australian punter Thomas O'Hara after the previous staff moved away from rugby-style punters.

FINAL ANALYSIS The new staff has not shied away from the idea that Indiana's championship gives more hope to traditional afterthoughts like Kentucky, but Indiana won big by making the right coaching hire. Stein has to prove that Kentucky did the same in taking a risk on the 36-year-old, first-time head coach who grew up rooting for the Wildcats. If his confidence is warranted, Kentucky could be a sleeper to watch.

2025 RESULTS (5-7, 2-6 SEC)

Aug. 30	Toledo	W	24-16
Sept. 6	Ole Miss	L	23-30
Sept. 13	Eastern Michigan	W	48-23
Sept. 27	at South Carolina	L	13-35
Oct. 4	at Georgia	L	14-35
Oct. 18	Texas (ot)	L	13-16
Oct. 25	Tennessee	L	34-56
Nov. 1	at Auburn	W	10-3
Nov. 8	Florida	W	38-7
Nov. 15	Tennessee Tech	W	42-10
Nov. 22	at Vanderbilt	L	17-45
Nov. 29	at Louisville	L	0-41

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	Youngstown State
Sept. 12	Alabama
Sept. 19	at Texas A&M
Sept. 26	South Alabama
Oct. 3	at South Carolina
Oct. 10	LSU
Oct. 17	at Oklahoma
Oct. 24	Vanderbilt
Nov. 7	at Tennessee
Nov. 14	Florida
Nov. 21	at Missouri
Nov. 28	Louisville

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Kenny Darby, WR	★★★★
2.	Matt Ponatoski, QB	★★★★
3.	Isaiah McMillian, CB	★★★★
4.	Justyn Hartley, LB	★★★★
5.	Ben Duncum, EDGE	★★★★
6.	Prince Jean, WR	★★★
7.	Lincoln Watkins, TE	★★★
8.	Cameron Miller Jr., OT	★★★
9.	Andre Clarke Jr., CB	★★★
10.	Denairius Gray, WR	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Will Stein • Record at School: First Season • Career Record: First Season • Offensive Coordinator: Joe Sloan
Defensive Coordinator: Jay Bateman • Location: Lexington, Ky. • Stadium: Kroger Field (61,000)

LSU TIGERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 10 | SEC PREDICTION: 5 | 2025 RECORD: 7-6, 3-5 SEC

OFFENSE Head coach Lane Kiffin's abrupt departure from Ole Miss for LSU on the cusp of the College Football Playoff was nationwide media fodder last fall. For LSU to be the talk of college football this season, Kiffin must take a team with 59 newcomers (including 43 transfers) and mold it into a cohesive unit. It starts with quarterback Sam Leavitt, who spent much of the offseason recovering from November foot surgery while at Arizona State. Leavitt has amassed more than 5,400 total yards and 46 total touchdowns in 24 games combined at ASU and Michigan State.

Leavitt will have a bevy of unfamiliar receivers to throw to, led by Florida's Eugene Wilson III (61 catches, 538 yards, six TDs in 2023), with the top left tackle in the portal, Jordan Seaton from Colorado, protecting his blind side. LSU has a slew of new running backs, too, but persuading Harlem Berry and Caden Durham to return was a major coup.

The X-factor could be returning tight end Trey'Dez Green (33 catches, 433 yards, seven TDs in 2025). One could see the wheels in Kiffin's head turning during the offseason as he dreamed up mismatches for the 6-foot-7 Green to exploit.

DEFENSE Kiffin got players like top-rated portal edge rusher Princewill Umanmielen (tied for third in the SEC with 9.0 sacks) and linebacker TJ Dottery (SEC-best 98 tackles) to follow him from Ole Miss, and safety Ty Benefield from Boise State (107 tackles) should be an instant starter.

But the story of LSU's defense is retention. Returning are linebacker Whit Weeks — though he was slowly recovering from a broken ankle suffered against Ole Miss — and cornerback DJ Pickett, the heir apparent to departed All-American Mansoor Delane. Another key returnee is defensive coordinator Blake Baker. The continuity on that side of the ball will be critical to the Tigers' hopes as Kiffin remakes the offense.

SPECIALISTS Grant Chadwick returns as LSU's punter after ranking second in the SEC in 2025 with a 45.7-yard average. Scott Starzyk from Arkansas is expected to slide into the placekicking role vacated by Damian Ramos, who graduated with numerous LSU records. Starzyk was a Freshman All-SEC pick last season, making 14-of-18 field goals and all 47 of his extra points.

FINAL ANALYSIS No question Kiffin has a great staff, which has assembled a great roster. But to be a playoff team for the first time since 2019, the Tigers must be more than a collection of talent. "It takes a ton of work to get a program back to where everyone here wants it to be," Kiffin says. With so many newcomers, not even Kiffin knows whether all that work will pay off.

2025 RESULTS (7-6, 3-5 SEC)

Aug. 30	at Clemson	W	17-10
Sept. 6	Louisiana Tech	W	23-7
Sept. 13	Florida	W	20-10
Sept. 20	SE Louisiana	W	56-10
Sept. 27	at Ole Miss	L	19-24
Oct. 11	South Carolina	W	20-10
Oct. 18	at Vanderbilt	L	24-31
Oct. 25	Texas A&M	L	25-49
Nov. 8	at Alabama	L	9-20
Nov. 15	Arkansas	W	23-22
Nov. 22	WKU	W	13-10
Nov. 29	at Oklahoma	L	13-17
Dec. 27	vs. Houston #	L	35-38

#Texas Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	Clemson
Sept. 12	Louisiana Tech
Sept. 19	at Ole Miss
Sept. 26	Texas A&M
Oct. 3	McNeese
Oct. 10	at Kentucky
Oct. 17	Mississippi State
Oct. 24	at Auburn
Nov. 7	Alabama
Nov. 14	Texas
Nov. 21	at Tennessee
Nov. 28	at Arkansas

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Lamar Brown, DL	★★★★★
2.	Richard Anderson, DL	★★★★★
3.	Corey Barber Jr., WR	★★★★★
4.	Deuce Geralds, DL	★★★★
5.	Trenton Henderson, EDGE	★★★★
6.	Brysten Martinez, OT	★★★★
7.	Havon Finney Jr., CB	★★★★
8.	Brayden Allen, WR	★★★★
9.	Jabari Mack, WR	★★★★
10.	Isaiah Washington, S	★★★★

*Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Lane Kiffin • Record at School: First Season
Career Record: 116-53 (13+ years) • Offensive Coordinators: Charlie Weis Jr., Joe Cox • Defensive Coordinators: Blake Baker, Chris Kiffin
Location: Baton Rouge, La. • Stadium: Tiger Stadium (102,321)

TREY'DEZ GREEN

SCOUTING THE TIGERS

"Any offense that Lane [Kiffin] has had, they've been unique, they've been multiple, they've been unconventional. Schematically, with [offensive coordinator] Charlie Weis Jr., I think they're gonna make people play 11-on-11 football. I could see them easily getting back to doing what LSU does. It's gonna be a four-quarter game against those guys every time you play them with the tempo and the athletes they always have. ... [LSU defensive coordinator] Blake Baker does such a great job of messing with a quarterback's eyes. He's a really big pain on third down. Ultimately, it's about what you can get your quarterback to know, and [Baker] makes it really hard on quarterbacks with what they think they see and what the reality is."

— An opposing SEC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)					
WR	1	Jayce Brown* (Sr.)	2	Tre' Brown* (Jr.)
WR	3	Eugene Wilson III* (Jr.)	6	Winston Watkins Jr.* (So.)
WR	4	Jackson Harris* (Jr.)	88	Malik Elzy* (Jr.)
LT	77	Jordan Seaton* (Jr.)	71	Brysten Martinez (Fr.)
LG	70	Devin Harper* (So.)	52	Ja'Quan Sprinkle* (Jr.)
C	**61**	**BRAELIN MOORE (SR.)**	50	William Satterwhite II* (So.)
RG	55	Aliou Bah* (Sr.)	69	Darrin Strey* (Fr.)
RT	**75**	**WESTON DAVIS (SO.)**	67	Bo Bordelon (Sr.)
TE	**14**	**TREY'DEZ GREEN (JR.)**	12	Malachi Thomas* (Jr.)
QB	10	Sam Leavitt* (Jr.)	6	Husan Longstreet* (Fr.)
RB	22	Harlem Berry (So.)	29	Caden Durham (Jr.)
DEFENSE (3)				
DE	1	Princewill Umanmielen* (Sr.)	93	Jaylen Brown* (So.)
DT	90	Stephiylan Green* (Jr.)	47	Malik Blocton* (Jr.)
DT	96	Dominick McKinley (Jr.)	94	Richard Anderson (Fr.)
DE	29	Jordan Ross* (Jr.)	97	Dylan Carpenter (Jr.)
LB	**40**	**WHIT WEEKS (SR.)**	6	TJ Dottery* (Sr.)
LB	42	Davhon Keys (Jr.)	35	Zach Weeks (Fr.)
CB	**11**	**PJ WOODLAND (JR.)**	8	Ja'Keem Jackson (Jr.)
CB	3	DJ Pickett (So.)	21	Michael Turner Jr. (So.)
STAR	10	Dashawn Spears (Jr.)	26	Charles Ross II (So.)
S	2	Ty Benefield* (Sr.)	28	Jhase Thomas (Fr.)
S	**0**	**TAMARCUS COOLEY (JR.)**	13	Faheem Delane* (So.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	80	Scott Starzyk* (So.)	KR	85	Josh Jackson* (So.)
P	90	Grant Chadwick (Jr.)	PR	85	Josh Jackson* (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

STEPHEN LEW-IMAGN IMAGES

KAMARIO TAYLOR

SCOUTING THE BULLDOGS

"Bringing back [defensive coordinator] Zach Arnett was a tremendous hire. Every single time his defense shows up, it's an anomaly for offenses. They don't see it week to week, and the way they run it and the aggressiveness behind it create problems. The thing they don't have there is the ability to sign two to four elite defensive tackles every year. Well, in that scheme, you just have to have one. They can have success without having to do what everybody else in the SEC has to do with a four-down front. ... [QB Kamario Taylor] is a phenom. He's athletically gifted. He can do a lot of things for them this year, not only with his arm, but also with his feet. He can keep plays alive, which turn into big plays."

— An opposing SEC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)				
WR	2	Marquis Johnson* (Sr.)	13	Sanfrisco Magee (So.)
WR	11	Ayden Williams (Sr.)	0	Gracen Harris (Fr.)
WR	**3**	**ANTHONY EVANS III (SR.)**	7	Zion Ragins* (So.)
LT	58	Miles McVay* (Jr.)	71	Saquon Miles (Jr.)
LG	78	DJ Chester* (Jr.)	**54**	**BLAKE STEEN (JR.)**
C	**72**	**CANON BOONE (SR.)**	63	Mario Nash* (Fr.)
RG	50	LJ Prudhomme* (Fr.)	77	TJ Lockhart (So.)
RT	55	Jakheem Shumpert-Perkins (Jr.)	75	Isaiah Dent* (So.)
TE	87	Sam West (Jr.)	18	Riley Williams* (Jr.)
QB	1	Kamario Taylor (So.)	17	AJ Swann* (Sr.)
RB	24	Fluff Bothwell (Jr.)	5	Xavier Gayten (Jr.)
DEFENSE (6)				
DE	43	Will Whitson (Sr.)	97	Jayson Jenkins* (Sr.)
DT	**35**	**KALVIN DINKINS (SR.)**	**9**	**JARAY BLEDSOE (SR.)**
DT	42	DJ Reed (Jr.)	14	Dealyn Evans* (So.)
EDGE	**4**	**AMAREE WILLIAMS* (JR.)**	16	Derion Gullette (Jr.)
LB	**10**	**JALEN SMITH (JR.)**	0	Fatt Forrest (So.)
LB	**7**	**ZAKARI TILLMAN (SR.)**	44	Gav Holman* (So.)
LB	11	Tyler Lockhart (So.)	13	LaKendrick James (Jr.)
CB	**1**	**KELLEY JONES (JR.)**	8	Kaylib Singleton* (Fr.)
CB	20	Jett Jefferson (Jr.)	24	Quentin Taylor* (So.)
S	5	Jardin Gilbert* (Sr.)	28	Tanner Johnson (Sr.)
S	2	Isaac Smith (Sr.)	15	Marcus Williams* (Sr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	80	Kyle Ferrie (Sr.)	KR	2 Marquis Johnson* (Sr.)
P	88	Ethan Pulliam (Jr.)	PR	3 Anthony Evans III (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

PETRE THOMAS-IMAGN IMAGES

MISSISSIPPI STATE BULLDOGS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 44 | SEC PREDICTION: 13 | 2025 RECORD: 5-8, 1-7 SEC

OFFENSE There is optimism at Mississippi State, and much of it comes courtesy of the Bulldogs' ultra-talented sophomore quarterback Kamario Taylor. The highest-rated quarterback recruit in program history flashed last season, winning a pair of SEC Freshman of the Week awards on his way to becoming the team's starter by the regular-season finale and then passing for 241 yards and a touchdown in the Duke's Mayo Bowl loss to Wake Forest.

The dual-threat signal-caller is surrounded by talent at the skill positions. Running back Fluff Bothwell looks for a fully healthy year after injury derailed a great start to 2025. The receiver room has depth and always seems to find playmakers under head coach Jeff Lebby. However, a big question mark surrounds MSU's offensive line play after that unit's inconsistencies hampered State far too often last season.

DEFENSE MSU's defense has been its biggest stumbling block the past two seasons, finishing last or next to last in the SEC in total defense both years. Lebby has brought back former State head coach and defensive coordinator Zach Arnett to try to restore order on that side of the ball. Arnett shined in his previous stint as defensive coordinator at State from 2020 through 2022. MSU finished fifth in the SEC in total defense in each of those seasons.

To get back to that level of success, the Bulldogs will need an improved pass rush — something that seems likely given Arnett's aggressive tendencies. They'll also look for stronger secondary play and have the pieces to get it, including senior safety Isaac Smith and corner Kelley Jones, who could very well play his way into the first round of the 2027 NFL Draft.

SPECIALISTS The Bulldogs bring back one of their most consistent placekickers of all time in senior Kyle Ferrie. Ferrie set State's all-time career scoring record for a kicker last season, and he now stands at fourth in program history for career points. Junior Ethan Pulliam, a former two-sport star at MSU, is back to punt for the Bulldogs. State has multiple speedy kick return options, from the returning Anthony Evans III, to transfer Marquis Johnson, to redshirt freshman Kolin Wilson.

FINAL ANALYSIS On paper, this is the most talented roster of the Lebby era at Mississippi State, and the group certainly has the potential to take another step forward after jumping from two wins in 2024 to five victories last season. If the offensive line is simply adequate (or better) and the Bulldogs can improve to somewhere around the middle of the pack in the SEC defensively, the cowbells could clang louder than they have in recent years in Starkville.

2025 RESULTS (5-8, 1-7 SEC)

Aug. 30	at Southern Miss	W	34-17
Sept. 6	Arizona State	W	24-20
Sept. 13	Alcorn	W	63-0
Sept. 20	Northern Illinois	W	38-10
Sept. 27	Tennessee (ot)	L	34-41
Oct. 4	at Texas A&M	L	9-31
Oct. 18	at Florida	L	21-23
Oct. 25	Texas (ot)	L	38-45
Nov. 1	at Arkansas	W	38-35
Nov. 8	Georgia	L	21-41
Nov. 15	at Missouri	L	27-49
Nov. 28	Ole Miss	L	19-38
Jan. 2	vs. Wake Forest #	L	29-43

#Duke's Mayo Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	ULM
Sept. 12	at Minnesota
Sept. 19	at South Carolina
Sept. 26	Missouri
Oct. 3	Alabama
Oct. 17	at LSU
Oct. 24	Oklahoma
Oct. 31	at Texas
Nov. 7	Vanderbilt
Nov. 14	Auburn
Nov. 21	Tennessee Tech
Nov. 28	at Ole Miss

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Micah Nickerson, EDGE	★★★★
2.	Bralan Womack, S	★★★★
3.	Zayion Cotton, TE	★★★★
4.	Jayden Cration, WR	★★★
5.	Zion Crumpton, WR	★★★
6.	Terrell Johnson Jr., CB	★★★
7.	Tico Crittendon Jr., DL	★★★
8.	Junior Henderson, WR	★★★
9.	Dalton Toothman, IOL	★★★
10.	Cooper Crosby, RB	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Jeff Lebby • Record at School: 7-18 (2 years)
Career Record: 7-18 (2 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Philip Montgomery
Defensive Coordinators: Zach Arnett, Matt Brock • Location: Starkville, Miss.
Stadium: Davis Wade Stadium (60,311)

MISSOURI TIGERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 29 | SEC PREDICTION: 11 | 2025 RECORD: 8-5, 4-4 SEC

OFFENSE In eight wins last season, Missouri averaged 41.1 points per game; in five losses, the Tigers averaged 12.8. Mizzou roared out of the gate with an offense driven by Ahmad Hardy's physical running and the controlled passing of Beau Pribula, but the Tigers couldn't control the line of scrimmage as effectively in SEC play, and scoring had already begun to dissipate when Pribula dislocated his ankle against Vanderbilt.

Hardy and Jamal Roberts return after combining for 2,402 rushing yards and 22 touchdowns, and they'll run behind three seniors in all-SEC tackle Cayden Green and guards Dominick Giudice (who could move to center) and Curtis Peagler. But new offensive coordinator Chip Lindsey, most recently of Michigan, must build a passing game from scratch with a new starting quarterback (Ole Miss transfer Austin Simmons) and three new starting receivers. Simmons has a huge arm and beat out Trinidad Chambliss in Ole Miss' fall camp last season, but he threw five interceptions in five games and then lost his job after getting hurt. Mizzou's fate could rest on Simmons cutting down on mistakes.

DEFENSE Missouri allowed just 18.9 points per game last season, its best defensive performance since 2015. Third-year coordinator Corey Batoon will have his work cut out for him in 2026, however: All 11 defenders who started at least seven games are gone. Plenty of experienced players return — end Darris Smith, tackle Marquis Gracial, linebacker Nicholas Rodriguez and safety Santana Banner have all seen starter-level snaps. But head coach Eliah Drinkwitz needed to strike portal gold.

The secondary appears well-stocked with cornerback transfers Chris Graves Jr. (Ole Miss) and Jahlil Florence (Oregon), and linebacker Robert Woodyard Jr. (Auburn) could be a like-for-like replacement for 2025 star Josiah Trotter. Seven defensive linemen arrive via the portal, but none are as proven as three high-profile departures (ends Zion Young and Damon Wilson II and tackle Chris McClellan). If the pass rush regresses too much, that could derail everything.

SPECIALISTS Placekicker Blake Craig suffered a torn ACL in last season's opener, and his backups didn't have his range or reliability. Craig returns, as does return man DaMarion Fowlkes, so improvement is likely over last year's poor special teams showing.

FINAL ANALYSIS Mizzou has won 29 games over the past three seasons, fewer than only Georgia, Texas, Alabama and Ole Miss in the SEC. Drinkwitz's program should be treated as a proven entity of sorts, but between massive defensive turnover and Simmons' all-or-nothing tendencies, Mizzou faces quite a bit of uncertainty in 2026.

2025 RESULTS (8-5, 4-4 SEC)

Aug. 28	Central Arkansas	W	61-6
Sept. 6	Kansas	W	42-31
Sept. 13	Louisiana	W	52-10
Sept. 20	South Carolina	W	29-20
Sept. 27	UMass	W	42-6
Oct. 11	Alabama	L	24-27
Oct. 18	at Auburn (ot)	W	23-17
Oct. 25	at Vanderbilt	L	10-17
Nov. 8	Texas A&M	L	17-38
Nov. 15	Mississippi State	W	49-27
Nov. 22	at Oklahoma	L	6-17
Nov. 29	at Arkansas	W	31-17
Dec. 27	vs. Virginia #	L	7-13

#Gator Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	Arkansas-Pine Bluff
Sept. 12	at Kansas
Sept. 19	Troy
Sept. 26	at Mississippi State
Oct. 3	Florida
Oct. 10	Texas A&M
Oct. 17	at Ole Miss
Oct. 31	at Arkansas
Nov. 7	Texas
Nov. 14	at Georgia
Nov. 21	Kentucky
Nov. 28	Oklahoma

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	DJ Jones Jr., OT	★★★★
2.	Braylon Ellison, IOL	★★★★
3.	JJ Bush, LB	★★★★
4.	Demarcus Johnson, DL	★★★
5.	Jaxson Gates, CB	★★★
6.	Brysen Wessell, IOL	★★★
7.	Tajh Overton, DL	★★★
8.	Jayden McGregory, S	★★★
9.	Jabari Brady, WR	★★★
10.	Gavin Sidwar, QB	★★★

*Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Eliah Drinkwitz • Record at School: 46-29 (6 years)
Career Record: 58-30 (7 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Chip Lindsey
Defensive Coordinators: Corey Batoon, Derek Nicholson • Location: Columbia, Mo. • Stadium: Faurot Field at Memorial Stadium (57,321)

AHMAD HARDY

SCOUTING THE TIGERS

"[Ahmad Hardy] is one of the top five running backs in college football in the last decade. That kid is special. Hiring [offensive coordinator] Chip Lindsey was a great hire for who they are and what they're trying to build as a program. They've got really good receivers. Last year, I don't think they could get downfield the way that they wanted to. With [Ole Miss QB transfer Austin Simmons], I think they'll be much better on offense. They'll run what he wants to run. Last year, they ran more gun-run for Beau [Pribula], and Simmons isn't really a gun-run guy. They're really more of a stretch-run and get downfield with a passing tree. This year, they'll be able to do that."

— An opposing SEC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR	1	Donovan Olugbode (So.)	4	Shaun Terry II (Fr.)
WR	19	Cayden Lee* (Sr.)	3	DaMarion Fowlkes (So.)
WR	2	Caleb Goodie* (Sr.)	0	Naeshaun Montgomery* (Fr.)
LT	**70**	**CAYDEN GREEN (SR.)**	75	Jack Lange (Fr.)
LG	52	Zach Owens* (Sr.)	51	Luke Work* (Jr.)
C	**56**	**DOMINICK GIUDICE (SR.)**	73	Tristan Wilson (Sr.)
RG	**77**	**CURTIS PEAGLER (SR.)**	79	Brandon Anderson (Fr.)
RT	54	Josh Atkins* (Sr.)	66	Logan Reichert (Jr.)
TE	**87**	**BRETT NORFLEET (SR.)**	**86**	**JORDON HARRIS (SR.)**
QB	13	Austin Simmons* (Jr.)	5	Matt Zollers (So.)
RB	**29**	**AHMAD HARDY (JR.)**	20	Jamal Roberts (Jr.)

DEFENSE (0)

EDGE	19	Darris Smith (Sr.)	29	Kamauryn Morgan* (So.)
DT	3	Marquis Gracial (Sr.)	8	Donta Simpson* (So.)
DT	95	Jalen Marshall (Sr.)		Mark Hensley* (Jr.)
DE	11	Langden Kitchen (Sr.)	13	Jaden Jones* (Sr.)
ILB	5	Nicholas Rodriguez (Jr.)	6	Jeremiah Beasley (Jr.)
ILB	0	Robert Woodyard Jr.* (Sr.)	9	Dante McClellan (So.)
CB	1	Chris Graves Jr.* (Sr.)	20	Cameron Keys (So.)
CB	21	Jahlil Florence* (Sr.)	2	Sione Laulea* (Sr.)
NB	22	Elijah Dotson* (So.)	7	Kensley Louidor-Faustin* (Jr.)
S	15	Santana Banner (Jr.)	18	JaDon Blair* (Fr.)
S	4	Trajen Greco (Jr.)	14	CJ Bass III (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	19	Blake Craig (Jr.)	KR	3	DaMarion Fowlkes (So.)
P	40	Brunno Reus* (Fr.)	PR	3	DaMarion Fowlkes (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

JAY BIGGERSTAFF-IMAGN IMAGES

JOHN MATEER

SARAH PHIPPS/THE OKLAHOMAN

SCOUTING THE SOONERS

"[QB John Mateer] has a ridiculously high ceiling. That offense has answers for everything. They don't do a ton, but everything they do complements the other thing. When he just executes and then makes splash plays here and there, they complement their elite defense very well. I was impressed with how [head coach] Brent [Venables] and [general manager] Jim Nagy structured the team, and it feels like they finally hit on what the recipe is to be successful there. ... Defensively, it's so many multiples. Week to week, they won't do the same pre-snap look again, so whatever you prepare for, you're not gonna get. Obviously, you want to create indecision with young quarterbacks or new quarterbacks in the system, and they do that at a really high level."

— An opposing SEC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR	3	Parker Livingstone* (So.)	14	Elijah Thomas (So.)
WR	11	Trell Harris* (Sr.)	5	Jer'Michael Carter (Sr.)
WR	**1**	**ISAIAH SATEGNA III (SR.)**	17	Mackenzie Alleyne* (So.)
LT	**56**	**MICHAEL FASUSI (SO.)**	72	Fred Hinton* (Jr.)
LG	55	Eddy Pierre-Louis (So.)	75	Daniel Akinkunmi (So.)
C	**69**	**JAKE MAIKKULA (SR.)**	60	Caleb Nitta* (Jr.)
RG	**70**	**RYAN FODJE (SO.)**	**77**	**HEATH OZAETA (JR.)**
RT	76	E'Marion Harris* (Sr.)	71	Peyton Joseph* (So.)
TE	89	Hayden Hansen* (Sr.)	81	Rocky Beers* (Sr.)
QB	**10**	**JOHN MATEER (SR.)**	16	Whitt Newbauer (So.)
RB	24	Xavier Robinson (Jr.)	6	Tory Blaylock (So.)

DEFENSE (5)

DE	**44**	**TAYLOR WEIN (JR.)**	93	Kenny Ozowalu* (So.)
DT	65	Jayden Jackson (Jr.)	2	Nigel Smith II (So.)
DT	0	David Stone (Jr.)	8	Bishop Thomas* (Sr.)
DE	34	Adepoju Adebawore (Sr.)	16	Danny Okoye (So.)
MLB	38	Owen Heinecke (Sr.)	47	James Nesta (So.)
WLB	**10**	**KIP LEWIS (SR.)**	28	Marcus James (Fr.)
CHEETAH	18	Cole Sullivan* (Jr.)	3	Reggie Powers III (Jr.)
CB	**4**	**COURTLAND GUILLORY (SO.)**	24	Jacobe Johnson (Sr.)
CB	**23**	**ELI BOWEN (JR.)**	14	Trystan Haynes (Fr.)
S	**22**	**PEYTON BOWEN (SR.)**	2	Omarion Robinson (So.)
S	25	Michael Boganowski (Jr.)	21	Jeremiah Newcombe (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	29	Tate Sandell (Sr.)	KR	9	Lloyd Avant* (Jr.)
P	43	Grayson Miller (Sr.)	PR	1	Isaiah Sategna III (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** · *2026 TRANSFER

OKLAHOMA SOONERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 8 | SEC PREDICTION: 3 | 2025 RECORD: 10-3, 6-2 SEC

OFFENSE Quarterback John Mateer's 2025 season was clearly split into pre-thumb-injury and post-thumb-injury segments, with the Sooners failing to reach 400 total yards in a single game after Mateer underwent surgery in late September. However, if an offseason of recovery helps Mateer get back to pre-injury levels, the OU offense could be in for a bigger improvement in coordinator Ben Arbuckle's second season.

OU pushed some young linemen into action, and further progress is expected from them, in particular left tackle Michael Fasusi. Even when Mateer played well last year, the run game had lackluster results, ending the year averaging 3.5 yards per carry. Still, the running back duo of Xavier Robinson and Tory Blaylock possesses the talent to be productive behind more experienced blockers.

The receiver group should see the ball spread to several players once again, but slot Isaiah Sategna III is back as a key target, and transfers Parker Livingstone from Texas and Trell Harris from Virginia Tech look ready to make an immediate impact.

DEFENSE The Sooners had one of the best defenses in the country, allowing 15.5 points and 272.5 yards per game, which is what carried them to the College Football Playoff. The unit lost a couple of pivotal players but returns leading tackler Kip Lewis at linebacker and sacks leader Taylor Wein at defensive end, with other experienced pieces up front.

The Bowen brothers, Peyton and Eli, are back in the secondary after picking off two passes apiece last season. Across the board, depth is more of a concern this year, but there's room for young players such as defensive end Danny Okoye or cornerback Jacobe Johnson to step forward.

Under head coach Brent Venables, defense has been the hallmark of the program, and while replicating last year's success won't be easy, the unit looks capable of continuing that trend.

SPECIALISTS Placekicker Tate Sandell is back after an All-America season in which he was 16-of-18 on field goals from 40 yards and beyond and 8-of-9 from 50 and beyond. Punter Grayson Miller also returns after averaging 45.8 yards per attempt. Sategna is a threat in the punt return game because of his elusiveness in space.

FINAL ANALYSIS Venables is in a safer situation than a year ago thanks to the playoff appearance. Building off that, the Sooners need the offense to take a step forward under Mateer's guidance and the defense to remain close to last year's levels. If those things happen, the Sooners should be positioned for another playoff run.

2025 RESULTS (10-3, 6-2 SEC)

Aug. 30	Illinois State	W	35-3
Sept. 6	Michigan	W	24-13
Sept. 13	at Temple	W	42-3
Sept. 20	Auburn	W	24-17
Oct. 4	Kent State	W	44-0
Oct. 11	vs. Texas #	L	6-23
Oct. 18	at South Carolina	W	26-7
Oct. 25	Ole Miss	L	26-34
Nov. 1	at Tennessee	W	33-27
Nov. 15	at Alabama	W	23-21
Nov. 22	Missouri	W	17-6
Nov. 29	LSU	W	17-13
Dec. 19	Alabama %	L	24-34

#Dallas %CFB Playoff First Round

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	UTEP
Sept. 12	at Michigan
Sept. 19	New Mexico
Sept. 26	at Georgia
Oct. 10	vs. Texas #
Oct. 17	Kentucky
Oct. 24	at Mississippi State
Oct. 31	South Carolina
Nov. 7	at Florida
Nov. 14	Ole Miss
Nov. 21	Texas A&M
Nov. 28	at Missouri

#Dallas

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Bowe Bentley, QB	★★★★
2.	Jonathan Hatton Jr., RB	★★★★
3.	Tyler Ruxer, TE	★★★★
4.	Jake Kreul, EDGE	★★★★
5.	Deacon Schmitt, IOL	★★★★
6.	Jahsiear Rogers, WR	★★★★
7.	Jacob Curry, LB	★★★★
8.	Derrick Johnson II, CB	★★★★
9.	Daniel Norman, EDGE	★★★★
10.	Matthew Nelson, EDGE	★★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Brent Venables • Record at School: 32-20 (4 years)
Career Record: 32-20 (4 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Ben Arbuckle
Defensive Coordinator: Brent Venables • Location: Norman, Okla.
Stadium: Gaylord Family Oklahoma Memorial Stadium (80,126)

OLE MISS REBELS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 11 | SEC PREDICTION: 6 | 2025 RECORD: 13-2, 7-1 SEC

OFFENSE After fighting the NCAA for eligibility this offseason, quarterback Trinidad Chambliss returns to play quarterback for Ole Miss in 2026. Chambliss went from backup to superstar last season, finishing eighth in Heisman Trophy voting and leading the Rebels to their first College Football Playoff berth. He was 10th nationally with 297.6 yards of total offense per game. He will be flanked by one of the nation's best running backs, Doak Walker Award finalist Kewan Lacy, who ran for 1,567 yards and 24 touchdowns.

The Rebels must replace more than 3,000 yards in receiving production and both starting tackles.

DEFENSE While losing leading edge rusher Princewill Umanmielen to LSU was a tough pill to swallow, Ole Miss returns a formidable defensive front headlined by a pair of homegrown talents entering their junior seasons. Tackle Will Echoles — the Sugar Bowl defensive MVP — finished with 11.5 tackles for a loss and five sacks, while end Kam Franklin had nine tackles for loss and five sacks.

Versatile linebacker Suntarine Perkins returns as well; he has 179 tackles, 32 tackles for a loss and 18.5 sacks in his career. Defensive backs Antonio Kite and Jaylon Braxton figure to headline a revamped secondary that includes highly touted transfers Edwin Joseph (Florida State) and Jalyn Crawford (Auburn).

SPECIALISTS Placekicker Lucas Carneiro is one of the top kickers in the nation; he made two 50-plus-yard kicks and the game-winning 47-yarder in the Sugar Bowl alone, and he hit 31-of-35 field goals overall. Punter Oscar Bird averaged 46 yards per punt and pinned 14 punts inside the 20-yard line as a freshman.

FINAL ANALYSIS Ole Miss got a taste of life after Lane Kiffin in the CFP, and the Rebel faithful have to like what they've seen so far in head coach Pete Golding, the team's former defensive coordinator. Ole Miss blew out Tulane in its CFP opener before winning an epic comeback over Georgia in the Sugar Bowl. The Rebels came up just short of an appearance in the national title game, falling to Miami (Fla.) 31-27 in the Fiesta Bowl.

A No. 3 finish in the AP Poll and the return of Chambliss and Lacy, among others, have set sky-high expectations in Oxford. The schedule is loaded, even by SEC standards. Ole Miss' SEC opener on Sept. 19 against Kiffin and LSU at Vaught-Hemingway Stadium will be appointment television and could set the tone for what might be another special season for the Rebels.

TRINIDAD CHAMBLISS

SCOUTING THE REBELS

"In those three games that he coached last year, Pete Golding was Pete Golding. He was himself. He naturally transitioned into his role while staying the same dude. That's gonna be the challenge. Can he continue to rely on all the things that have made him a big-time ball coach, or is he going to try to be the anti-Lane [Kiffin]? A lot of people in Oxford want him to be the anti-Lane, but he just needs to be Pete Golding. ... [Trinidad Chambliss] is absolutely the top returning quarterback in the country. He's a winner, he's got a feel for the game, he's got presence, he looks like he's got tremendous leadership skills. But can that defense be improved enough to let the growth happen offensively without [former offensive coordinator] Charlie Weis Jr.?"

— An opposing SEC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)				
WR	15	Darrell Gill Jr.* (Sr.)	0	Johntay Cook II* (Sr.)
WR	3	Caleb Cunningham (Fr.)	11	Horatio Fields* (Sr.)
WR	1	Deuce Alexander (Jr.)	7	Traylon Ray (Jr.)
LT	61	Tommy Kinsler IV* (Jr.)	77	Enoch Wangoy* (So.)
LG	**51**	**DELANO TOWNSEND (JR.)**	50	Troy Everett* (Sr.)
C	**62**	**BRYCEN SANDERS (JR.)**	65	Connor Howes (So.)
RG	**75**	**PATRICK KUTAS (SR.)**	76	John Wayne Oliver (So.)
RT	57	Carius Curne* (So.)	55	Terez Davis (So.)
TE	9	Luke Hasz (Sr.)	4	Caleb Odom (Jr.)
QB	**6**	**TRINIDAD CHAMBLISS (SR.)**	2	Deuce Knight* (Fr.)
RB	**5**	**KEWAN LACY (JR.)**	25	Makhi Frazier* (Jr.)
DEFENSE (5)				
DE	**5**	**KAM FRANKLIN (JR.)**	15	Landon Barnes (Fr.)
DT	**52**	**WILL ECHOLES (JR.)**	9	Jehiem Oatis* (Sr.)
DT	88	Michai Boireau* (Jr.)	96	Jamarious Brown (Jr.)
EDGE	1	Jordan Renaud* (Jr.)	3	Blake Purchase* (Jr.)
LB	**4**	**SUNTARINE PERKINS (SR.)**	26	Ant Davis (Fr.)
LB	12	Luke Ferrelli* (So.)	49	Tah'j Butler* (Jr.)
LB	11	Keaton Thomas* (Sr.)	23	Jarcoby Hopson (Fr.)
CB	**8**	**ANTONIO KITE (SR.)**	28	Dante Core (Fr.)
CB	**2**	**JAYLON BRAXTON (JR.)**	0	Jalyn Crawford* (Jr.)
S	7	Sharif Denson* (Sr.)	6	Joenel Aguero* (Sr.)
S	14	Edwin Joseph* (Jr.)	31	Ladarian Clardy (So.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	17	Lucas Carneiro (Sr.)	KR	7 Traylon Ray (Jr.)
P	33	Oscar Bird (So.)	PR	7 Traylon Ray (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** · *2026 TRANSFER

2025 RESULTS (13-2, 7-1 SEC)

Aug. 30	Georgia State	W	63-7
Sept. 6	at Kentucky	W	30-23
Sept. 13	Arkansas	W	41-35
Sept. 20	Tulane	W	45-10
Sept. 27	LSU	W	24-19
Oct. 11	Washington State	W	24-21
Oct. 18	at Georgia	L	35-43
Oct. 25	at Oklahoma	W	34-26
Nov. 1	South Carolina	W	30-14
Nov. 8	The Citadel	W	49-0
Nov. 15	Florida	W	34-24
Nov. 28	at Mississippi State	W	38-19
Dec. 20	Tulane #	W	41-10
Jan. 1	vs. Georgia %	W	39-34
Jan. 8	vs. Miami (Fla.) &	L	27-31

#CFB Playoff First Round %Sugar Bowl: CFB Playoff Quarterfinal &Fiesta Bowl: CFB Playoff Semifinal

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 6	vs. Louisville #
Sept. 12	Charlotte
Sept. 19	LSU
Sept. 26	at Florida
Oct. 10	at Vanderbilt
Oct. 17	Missouri
Oct. 24	at Texas
Oct. 31	Auburn
Nov. 7	Georgia
Nov. 14	at Oklahoma
Nov. 21	Wofford
Nov. 28	Mississippi State

#Nashville, TN

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Jase Mathews, WR	★★★★
2.	Landon Barnes, EDGE	★★★★
3.	Damarius Yates, RB	★★★★
4.	Craig Tutt, S	★★★★
5.	Emanuel Faulkner, OT	★★★★
6.	Jayden Curtis, DL	★★★★
7.	Iverson McCoy, CB	★★★
8.	Dorian Barney, CB	★★★
9.	Carmelow Reed, DL	★★★
10.	Ant Davis, LB	★★★

*Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Pete Golding • Record at School: 2-1 (1 year)
Career Record: 2-1 (1 year) • Offensive Coordinators: John David Baker, Cody Woodiel • Defensive Coordinators: Bryan Brown, Marcus Woodson
Location: Oxford, Miss. • Stadium: Vaught-Hemingway Stadium (64,038)

PETRE THOMAS-IMAGN IMAGES

LaNORRIS SELLERS

JEFF BLAKE-IMAGN IMAGES

SCOUTING THE GAMECOCKS

"I don't know that they're gonna be better. I haven't felt very good about them the last couple of years, other than that they have an elite edge rusher. But they've already got a couple of tackles hurt, which could factor into it. My guess is they'll be decent, middle of the pack. ... [QB LaNorris Sellers] is an elite athlete. He's very hot and cold. If they can protect him but allow him to show his athleticism, they can be a legitimate problem. He's one of the strongest people I've ever seen live. He's a mismatch for almost everybody. If he feels overwhelmed like he did last year, that wouldn't be good. But I think they're gonna make it easy and get the ball out of his hands, as well as some designed runs where he's taking on a DB in space or out-athleting D-linemen."

— An opposing SEC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)

WR	8	**NYCK HARBOR (SR.)**	7	Jordon Gidron (Fr.)
WR	17	**JAYDEN SELLERS (SO.)**	3	Mazeo Bennett Jr. (Jr.)
WR	1	Nitro Tuggle* (Jr.)	6	Donovan Murph (So.)
LT	72	**SHED SARRATT JR. (SO.)**	55	Adedamola Ajidahun (Fr.)
LG	52	Hank Purvis* (Jr.)	71	Blake Franks (So.)
C	50	Carter Miller* (Sr.)	62	Nolan Hay (Sr.)
RG	69	Emmanuel Kojo Poku* (Sr.)	58	Markee Anderson (Jr.)
RT	75	Dayne Arnett* (Sr.)	76	Zyon Guiles (Fr.)
TE	87	Brady Hunt (Sr.)	5	Mike Tyler (So.)
QB	16	**LANORRIS SELLERS (JR.)**	12	Cutter Woods (Fr.)
RB	28	Matt Fuller (So.)	10	Christian Clark* (So.)

DEFENSE (5)

EDGE	6	**DYLAN STEWART (JR.)**	10	George Wilson Jr. (Sr.)
DT	99	Gabriel Brownlow-Dindy (Sr.)	33	Troy Pikes (Jr.)
DT	13	Tomiwa Durojaiye* (Sr.)	97	Kelby Collins* (Sr.)
EDGE	93	Julian Walker (Fr.)	39	Caleb Herring* (Sr.)
LB	0	**JAYR JOHNSON (JR.)**	7	Shawn Murphy (Sr.)
LB	17	**JUSTIN OKORONKWO (JR.)**	15	Donovan Darden (So.)
CB	8	**JUDGE COLLIER (SR.)**	19	Damarcus Leach (So.)
CB	4	Vicari Swain (Jr.)	42	Jalewis Solomon (So.)
NB	12	Quay'sheed Scott* (Jr.)	1	Gerald Kilgore (Sr.)
S	31	**PEYTON WILLIAMS (SR.)**	5	Kendall Daniels Jr. (So.)
S	9	David Bucey (Jr.)	14	J'Zavien Currence (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	14	Max Kelley (So.)	KR	8 Nyck Harbor (Sr.)
P	24	Mason Love (So.)	PR	4 Vicari Swain (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • * 2026 TRANSFERS

SOUTH CAROLINA GAMECOCKS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 28 | SEC PREDICTION: 10 | 2025 RECORD: 4-8, 1-7 SEC

OFFENSE LaNorris Sellers is back for another go-round, hoping to make up for what was a disappointing second season under center. He'll have new coordinator Kendal Briles and a rebuilt running back room to help, but the offensive line is a major concern, especially with tackle Josiah Thompson out for the year and transfer tackle Jacarrius Peak questionable at best to play any games this year due to a lingering knee injury.

As he proved last year, Sellers can't operate without line support (43 sacks allowed, 15th in the SEC) and with a playbook that forced him to limit his running and hold onto the ball until his receivers could get loose. The Gamecocks offense ranked 15th in the SEC in scoring and 14th in rushing, and former coordinator Mike Shula was fired at midseason.

The assumption is that Briles will try to overcome the line's weaknesses with Sellers' mobility and that he will maximize what the Gamecocks do have — depth and talent at receiver and tight end. Nyck Harbor, Nitro Tuggle, Donovan Murph, Mazeo Bennett Jr., Brady Hunt, Mike Tyler and Sellers' brother Jayden should all have a turn catching the ball.

DEFENSE In 2024, the South Carolina defense was one of the best in the SEC. A year later, deprived of playmaking draft picks and having to be on the field too much due to a misfiring offense, it ranked 10th. Worse, it lost two draft picks and a four-year starter in DQ Smith. With Dylan Stewart sitting out of spring ball recovering from a back injury, the early part of the season for coordinator Clayton White's unit will be crucial.

USC has to be stronger up front and brought in several transfers to aid that effort. Stewart's back issues, and the fact that he was double-teamed on almost every snap, limited him to 12 tackles for a loss and 4.5 sacks last year. He can team with heralded prospect Julian Walker at the other edge spot to create a fearsome pass rush.

Judge Collier and Peyton Williams (two interceptions in 2025) lead the secondary, with true freshman J'Zavien Currence coming on.

SPECIALISTS Mason Love returns after finishing fourth in the SEC in punting last year (45.1-yard average), but South Carolina needs a new placekicker. Vicari Swain returned three punts for touchdowns in 2025.

FINAL ANALYSIS USC cratered under head coach Shane Beamer last year, going 4-8 a year removed from a 9-4 season. The Gamecocks return Sellers but have a new offensive coordinator and a beat-up O-line. Their defense was good but not great and lost some talent.

Expectations were high last year and went unmet. USC is a program that has struggled to sustain success when reality says a winning season should be the norm. A winning season should be the ceiling this year.

2025 RESULTS (4-8, 1-7 SEC)

Aug. 31	vs. Virginia Tech #	W	24-11
Sept. 6	South Carolina State	W	38-10
Sept. 13	Vanderbilt	L	7-31
Sept. 20	at Missouri	L	20-29
Sept. 27	Kentucky	W	35-13
Oct. 11	at LSU	L	10-20
Oct. 18	Oklahoma	L	7-26
Oct. 25	Alabama	L	22-29
Nov. 1	at Ole Miss	L	14-30
Nov. 15	at Texas A&M	L	30-31
Nov. 22	Coastal Carolina	W	51-7
Nov. 29	Clemson	L	14-28

#Atlanta

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	Kent State
Sept. 12	Towson
Sept. 19	Mississippi State
Sept. 26	at Alabama
Oct. 3	Kentucky
Oct. 10	at Florida
Oct. 24	Tennessee
Oct. 31	at Oklahoma
Nov. 7	Texas A&M
Nov. 14	at Arkansas
Nov. 21	Georgia
Nov. 28	at Clemson

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Julian Walker, EDGE	★★★★★
2.	Zyon Guiles, IOL	★★★★
3.	J'Zavien Currence, S	★★★★
4.	Darius Gray, IOL	★★★★
5.	Aiden Harris, DL	★★★★
6.	Landon Duckworth, QB	★★★★
7.	Kosci Barnes, CB	★★★★
8.	Caden Ramsey, TE	★★★★
9.	Andrew Harris, EDGE	★★★
10.	KJ Johnson, CB	★★★

**Per Rivals*

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Shane Beamer • Record at School: 33-30 (5 years)
Career Record: 33-30 (5 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Kendal Briles
Defensive Coordinators: Clayton White, Torrian Gray • Location: Columbia, S.C.
Stadium: Williams-Brice Stadium (77,559)

TENNESSEE VOLUNTEERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 21 | SEC PREDICTION: 8 | 2025 RECORD: 8-5, 4-4 SEC

OFFENSE The 2026 season is a critical one for head coach Josh Heupel, and adding to the stress, he's breaking in a new quarterback. Joey Aguilar keyed Tennessee's offensive resurgence in 2025, but he is out of eligibility. George MacIntyre might have the edge because he's been in Heupel's system for a year. Colorado transfer Ryan Staub (427 passing yards, three TDs, four INTs last season) has the most experience, and 5-star freshman Faizon Brandon, a top-10 recruit nationally, has the highest ceiling.

Leading wide receiver Chris Brazzell II is off to the NFL after an impressive campaign, but Braylon Staley's return bolsters an otherwise young receiving corps.

Running back DeSean Bishop returns after rushing for 1,076 yards during an All-SEC campaign, and he'll help ease the new quarterback's transition. Tulane transfer Javin Gordon and Daune Morris comprise the rest of the backfield. They'll play behind an offensive line that returns five starters and a number of contributors.

DEFENSE The defense was the Vols' biggest liability last season. Heupel fired coordinator Tim Banks after five seasons and brought in ex-Penn State DC Jim Knowles as his replacement.

Chaz Coleman followed Knowles from State College and could be the next standout edge on the defensive front. Tackle Daevin Hobbs brings experience, but he missed much of the spring with a foot injury.

Amare Campbell is another addition from Penn State, and persuading Arion Carter to return was huge for the linebacking corps. Edwin Spillman and Jadon Perlotte are back after solid freshman seasons.

Injuries plagued the cornerbacks last season. Ty Redmond took advantage of his opportunities and was third-team All-SEC as a freshman. Transfers TJ Metcalf (Michigan) and DJ Burks (Appalachian State) bring experience to the safety spots alongside returning starter Edrees Farooq.

SPECIALISTS Cooper Ranvier, an All-ACC kicker at Louisville, replaces Max Gilbert, who transferred after starting the past two seasons. Punter Jackson Ross returns for his fourth season after averaging 44.0 yards per punt as a junior. Joakim Dodson, who returned a kickoff for a touchdown vs. Illinois in the Music City Bowl, could provide a threat on returns.

FINAL ANALYSIS The offense carried the Vols last season, but defensive struggles led to a disappointing 8-5 finish. Heupel took a big step toward fixing those issues by hiring Knowles and adding impact transfers familiar with his system. Too many questions remain at quarterback to know if the offense can approach what it did last season. Couple that with a challenging schedule, and there will be very little room for error.

2025 RESULTS (8-5, 4-4 SEC)

Aug. 30	vs. Syracuse #	W	45-26
Sept. 6	ETSU	W	72-17
Sept. 13	Georgia (ot)	L	41-44
Sept. 20	UAB	W	56-24
Sept. 27	at Mississippi St. (ot)	W	41-34
Oct. 11	Arkansas	W	34-31
Oct. 18	at Alabama	L	20-37
Oct. 25	at Kentucky	W	56-34
Nov. 1	Oklahoma	L	27-33
Nov. 15	New Mexico State	W	42-9
Nov. 22	at Florida	W	31-11
Nov. 29	Vanderbilt	L	24-45
Dec. 30	vs. Illinois %	L	28-30

#Atlanta %Music City Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	Furman
Sept. 12	at Georgia Tech
Sept. 19	Kennesaw State
Sept. 26	Texas
Oct. 3	Auburn
Oct. 10	at Arkansas
Oct. 17	Alabama
Oct. 24	at South Carolina
Nov. 7	Kentucky
Nov. 14	at Texas A&M
Nov. 21	LSU
Nov. 28	at Vanderbilt

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Tristen Keys, WR	★★★★
2.	Faizon Brandon, QB	★★★★
3.	Carter Gooden, EDGE	★★★★
4.	Brayden Rouse, LB	★★★★
5.	Zaydyn Anderson, CB	★★★★
6.	Joel Wyatt, S	★★★★
7.	Tyreek King, WR	★★★★
8.	TJ White, LB	★★★★
9.	Kamari Blair, OT	★★★★
10.	Gabriel Osenda, OT	★★★★

*Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Josh Heupel • Record at School: 45-20 (5 years)
Career Record: 73-28 (8 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Joey Halzle
Defensive Coordinators: Jim Knowles, Anthony Poindexter
Location: Knoxville, Tenn. • Stadium: Neyland Stadium (101,915)

DESEAN BISHOP

ANGELINA ALCANTAR/NEWS SENTINEL

SCOUTING THE VOLUNTEERS

"Having the [Joey] Aguilar deal not go their way is a good thing for the SEC. They're unproven at quarterback. It's a pivotal year for them to succeed. I don't think they'll be better. Without a veteran quarterback in that system, you don't feel the same energy and excitement around that program. Every time we've faced them or versions of them, it all runs through their quarterback and how confident he is at stretching the field and how mobile he is. ... They want to run the ball. But do they have enough of a threat downfield to open up the run lanes? The last time they were extremely potent was when [former offensive coordinator Alex] Golesh was there."

— An opposing SEC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (8)

WR	4	**MIKE MATTHEWS (JR.)**	1	Travis Smith Jr. (So.)
WR	14	**BRAYLON STALEY (SO.)**	81	Ian Duarte* (Jr.)
WR	5	Radarious Jackson (So.)	80	TK Keys (Fr.)
LT	70	**DAVID SANDERS JR. (SO.)**	51	Jeremias Heard (So.)
LG	75	**WENDELL MOE JR. (SR.)**	74	**SHAMURAD UMAROV (JR.)**
C	56	**SAM PENDLETON (JR.)**	58	Nic Moore (Fr.)
RG	72	**JESSE PERRY (SO.)**	67	Donovan Haslam* (Sr.)
RT	77	Ory Williams (So.)	79	Gabriel Osenda (Fr.)
TE	0	Ethan Davis (Jr.)	7	DaSaahn Brame (So.)
QB	15	George MacIntyre (Fr.)	17	Ryan Staub* (Jr.)
RB	18	**DESEAN BISHOP (JR.)**	21	Javin Gordon* (So.)

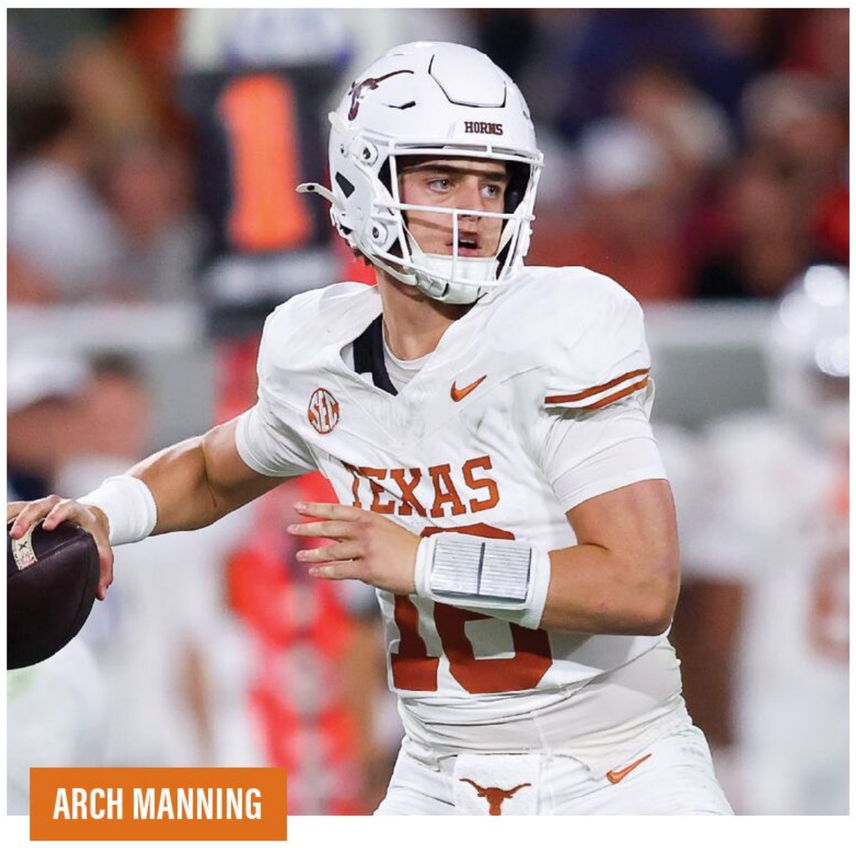
DEFENSE (4)

DE	18	Tyree Weathersby (Jr.)	9	Mariyon Dye (So.)
DT	5	Daevin Hobbs (Sr.)	17	Ethan Utley (So.)
DT	54	Xavier Gilliam* (So.)	94	Nathan Robinson (Jr.)
EDGE	90	Chaz Coleman* (So.)	93	Jordan Norman* (Jr.)
MLB	55	Amare Campbell* (Sr.)	22	**JEREMIAH TELANDER (SR.)**
WLB	7	**ARION CARTER (SR.)**	13	Edwin Spillman (So.)
CB	4	**TY REDMOND (SO.)**	21	Tre Poteat III (So.)
CB	20	Kayin Lee* (Sr.)	29	Jadais Richard* (Sr.)
NB	19	Qua Moss* (Sr.)	37	Isaiah Hardge* (Jr.)
SS	15	**EDREES FAROOQ (JR.)**	26	Sidney Walton (So.)
FS	28	TJ Metcalf* (Sr.)	42	DJ Burks* (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	97	Cooper Ranvier* (So.)	KR	89	Joakim Dodson (Fr.)
P	98	Jackson Ross (Sr.)	PR	89	Joakim Dodson (Fr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER



ARCH MANNING

SCOUTING THE LONGHORNS

"They made some bold moves. Obviously, there's a ton of money in that program, so you've gotta feel like they made moves that they felt they had to make to make their program better. What's that gonna look like after a loss or two? I don't know. ... I thought Arch [Manning] got better as the season went on. Is he what he was unfairly hyped to be? Probably not, but I think he's a good solid quarterback in this league. On paper, I think they're the team to beat in the SEC. They might be preseason No. 1 again. ... [Manning] is gonna be just fine. I think he did such a good job of managing it, but he was put in a tough situation. It was literally a 'Heisman or bust' situation for a kid who hadn't played yet. But he's super talented, he does everything right, he prepares hard, he'll be just fine."

— An opposing SEC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR	8	Cam Coleman* (Jr.)	18	Sterling Berkhalter* (Sr.)
WR	1	**RYAN WINGO (JR.)**	7	Kaliq Lockett (Fr.)
WR	3	**EMMETT MOSLEY V (JR.)**	4	Jermaine Bishop Jr. (Fr.)
LT	74	**TREVOR GOOSBY (JR.)**	78	Jordan Coleman (Fr.)
LG	50	Laurence Seymore* (Sr.)	75	Jaydon Chatman (Jr.)
C	62	**CONNOR ROBERTSON (SR.)**	56	Dylan Sikorski* (So.)
RG	73	**BRANDON BAKER (JR.)**	58	Devin Coleman (Fr.)
RT	71	Melvin Siani* (Sr.)	77	Andre Cojoe (So.)
TE	15	Michael Masunas* (Jr.)	83	Spencer Shannon (Jr.)
QB	16	**ARCH MANNING (JR.)**	9	Karle "KJ" Lacey Jr. (Fr.)
RB	0	Raleek Brown* (Sr.)	2	Hollywood Smothers* (Jr.)

DEFENSE (5)

DE	40	Lance Jackson (So.)	19	Zina Umeozulu (So.)
DT	93	**HERO KANU (SR.)**	95	Ian Geffrard* (Sr.)
DT	97	**ALEX JANUARY (JR.)**	88	Maraad Watson (Jr.)
OLB	1	**COLIN SIMMONS (JR.)**	14	Brad Spence (Sr.)
ILB	3	Rasheem Biles* (Sr.)	16	Tyler Atkinson (Fr.)
ILB	26	Ty'Anthony Smith (Jr.)	28	Justin Cryer* (Sr.)
CB	5	Bo Mascoe* (Sr.)	6	Kobe Black (Jr.)
CB	8	Kade Phillips (So.)	24	Warren Roberson (Jr.)
STAR	29	**GRACESON LITTLETON (SO.)**	27	Wardell Mack (So.)
S	4	**JELANI MCDONALD (SR.)**	9	Jonah Williams (So.)
S	17	Xavier Filsaime (Jr.)	2	Derek Williams Jr. (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	44	Gianni Spetic* (Sr.)	KR	0	Raleek Brown* (Sr.)
P	43	Mac Chiumento* (Sr.)	PR	21	Ryan Niblett (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

BRETT DAVIS-IMAGN IMAGES

TEXAS LONGHORNS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 3 | SEC PREDICTION: 2 | 2025 RECORD: 10-3, 6-2 SEC

OFFENSE After watching quarterback Arch Manning finish the 2025 season by throwing for 11 touchdowns with one interception over the final five games while running for four TDs and even catching a TD pass, head coach Steve Sarkisian went all-in to try to win a national championship by creating the most explosive offense possible. In came the transfers — big-play wide receiver Cam Coleman (Auburn), electric running backs Raleek Brown (Arizona State) and Hollywood Smothers (NC State) and tackle Melvin Siani (Wake Forest). Texas also added 5-star wideout Jermaine Bishop Jr., who is drawing comparisons to a young Xavier Worthy.

"Our ability to create explosive plays is showing up," Sarkisian said coming out of spring ball.

Texas needs to hit on its O-line transfers because the inconsistency of last year's offensive line was a major contributor to the Longhorns averaging the fewest points per game (30.5) of the Sarkisian era in Austin.

DEFENSE Sarkisian traded out a top-notch defensive coordinator in Pete Kwiatkowski (whose defenses gave up an average of 18.1 ppg the last three seasons) in hopes of an even better one with the hire of Will Muschamp. Muschamp, who spent four of the past five years on Kirby Smart's staff at Georgia, brought Smart's double-A-gap pressure with him back to Texas, where Muschamp served as DC from 2008-10.

Muschamp has playmakers at every level with end Colin Simmons, the SEC's sack leader (12) in 2025; linebacker Ty'Anthony Smith and transfers Rasheem Biles (Pitt) and Justin Cryer (Florida State); and safety Jelani McDonald (team leader in tackles and interceptions in 2025).

Gone is Kwiatkowski's bend-but-don't-break philosophy in favor of Muschamp's attacking style, which includes cornerbacks playing press-man instead of off coverage.

SPECIALISTS Texas will have a new placekicker, punter and long-snapper in 2026 — Gianni Spetic (Memphis), Mac Chiumento (Florida State) and Trey Dubuc (New Mexico), respectively. Junior Ryan Niblett finished as the nation's No. 2 punt returner in 2025 with punts returned for TDs in wins over Oklahoma and Mississippi State.

FINAL ANALYSIS With a confident Manning leading the team, the Longhorns should be better equipped to face Ohio State in Austin. Texas needs its top transfers — Coleman, Biles, Brown, Smothers, Siani and CB Bo Mascoe (Rutgers) — to come through and stay healthy. If that happens, the Longhorns have a chance to make a deep playoff run in what is likely to be the final season for juniors Manning, Coleman and Simmons.

2025 RESULTS (10-3, 6-2 SEC)

Aug. 30	at Ohio State	L	7-14
Sept. 6	San José State	W	38-7
Sept. 13	UTEP	W	27-10
Sept. 20	Sam Houston	W	55-0
Oct. 4	at Florida	L	21-29
Oct. 11	vs. Oklahoma #	W	23-6
Oct. 18	at Kentucky (ot)	W	16-13
Oct. 25	at Mississippi St. (ot)	W	45-38
Nov. 1	Vanderbilt	W	34-31
Nov. 15	at Georgia	L	10-35
Nov. 22	Arkansas	W	52-37
Nov. 28	Texas A&M	W	27-17
Dec. 31	vs. Michigan %	W	41-27

#Dallas %Citrus Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	Texas State
Sept. 12	Ohio State
Sept. 19	UTSA
Sept. 26	at Tennessee
Oct. 10	vs. Oklahoma #
Oct. 17	Florida
Oct. 24	Ole Miss
Oct. 31	Mississippi State
Nov. 7	at Missouri
Nov. 14	at LSU
Nov. 21	Arkansas
Nov. 27	at Texas A&M

#Dallas

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Richard Wesley, EDGE	★★★★★
2.	Dia Bell, QB	★★★★★
3.	Jamarion Carlton, DL	★★★★
4.	Tyler Atkinson, LB	★★★★
5.	John Turntine III, IOL	★★★★
6.	James Johnson, DL	★★★★
7.	Kosi Okpala, EDGE	★★★★
8.	Jermaine Bishop Jr., ATH	★★★★
9.	Nicolas Robertson, IOL	★★★★
10.	Kohen Brown, WR	★★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Steve Sarkisian • Record at School: 48-20 (5 years)
Career Record: 93-55 (11+ years) • Offensive Coordinator: Kyle Flood
Defensive Coordinators: Will Muschamp, Johnny Nansen • Location: Austin, Texas • Stadium: Darrell K Royal–Texas Memorial Stadium (100,119)

TEXAS A&M AGGIES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 9 | SEC PREDICTION: 4 | 2025 RECORD: 11-2, 7-1 SEC

OFFENSE The Aggies have no shortage of big-play ability. They need consistency, though, and that starts with junior quarterback Marcel Reed. Last season, Reed passed for 3,169 yards and 25 touchdowns. He rushed for another 493 yards and six TDs. But he threw a dozen interceptions and struggled in season-closing losses to Texas and Miami (Fla.). New offensive coordinator Holmon Wiggins and quarterbacks coach Joey Lynch are tasked with helping Reed boost production and stability.

The return of leading rusher Rueben Owens II will help. So will All-SEC receiver Mario Craver, who had 917 receiving yards in 2025. Craver is joined by Ashton Bethel-Roman, who also emerged in the second half of last season, and Alabama transfer Isaiah Horton. The 6-foot-4 Horton fills a need for a big receiver who can win on 50-50 balls.

Center Mark Nabou Jr. is the only returning starter on the offensive line. However, A&M restocked the line with four transfers with SEC starting experience. The most notable additions are tackles Wilkin Formby from Alabama and Tyree Adams from LSU.

DEFENSE The secondary projects as the strength of the defense. Safeties Marcus Ratcliffe and Dalton Brooks and cornerback Dezz Ricks are proven. The Aggies were third in the SEC in passing defense last season. That's the good news. The bad news is that they managed only three interceptions, a total that must rise.

A&M was fourth in the nation in sacks last season, but SEC Defensive Player of the Year Cashius Howell is gone. Fingers are crossed that sophomore Marco Jones or transfer Anto Saka can step into Howell's role and lead another fierce pass rush.

Linebacker Ray Coney, a transfer from Tulsa, was 10th in the nation in tackles. Perhaps he can help end the Aggies' frustrating tendency to give up long runs.

SPECIALISTS Illinois transfer David Olano should remedy an erratic kicking game. His career field goal success rate is 86%, which would be a massive upgrade. A&M has a history of explosive return specialists. Craver (punts) and fellow wideout Terry Bussey (kickoffs) can continue that trend.

FINAL ANALYSIS More than 30 years have passed since A&M had consecutive 10-win seasons. Ending the drought likely requires an improved Reed and an effective offensive line. Head coach Mike Elko appears confident. "I think we have a unique opportunity to double down on success," he says. "We have found ways, at times over the years, to hit one-year peaks. The next step for us is consistently being a top-10 team, consistently being a playoff team, consistently being a team that finishes and gets to Atlanta."

2025 RESULTS (11-2, 7-1 SEC)

Aug. 30	UTSA	W	42-24
Sept. 6	Utah State	W	44-22
Sept. 13	at Notre Dame	W	41-40
Sept. 27	Auburn	W	16-10
Oct. 4	Mississippi State	W	31-9
Oct. 11	Florida	W	34-17
Oct. 18	at Arkansas	W	45-42
Oct. 25	at LSU	W	49-25
Nov. 8	at Missouri	W	38-17
Nov. 15	South Carolina	W	31-30
Nov. 22	Samford	W	48-0
Nov. 28	at Texas	L	17-27
Dec. 20	Miami (Fla.)#	L	3-10

#CFB Playoff First Round

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	Missouri State
Sept. 12	Arizona State
Sept. 19	Kentucky
Sept. 26	at LSU
Oct. 3	Arkansas
Oct. 10	at Missouri
Oct. 17	The Citadel
Oct. 24	at Alabama
Nov. 7	at South Carolina
Nov. 14	Tennessee
Nov. 21	at Oklahoma
Nov. 27	Texas

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Brandon Arrington, CB	★★★★★
2.	KJ Edwards, RB	★★★★
3.	Sam Roseborough, IOL	★★★★
4.	Bryce Perry-Wright, EDGE	★★★★
5.	Jayden Warren, WR	★★★★
6.	Aaron Gregory, WR	★★★★
7.	Tylan Wilson, S	★★★★
8.	KK Johnson, ATH	★★★★
9.	Chance Collins, S	★★★★
10.	Vic Singleton, CB	★★★★

*Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Mike Elko • Record at School: 19-7 (2 years)
Career Record: 35-16 (4 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Holmon Wiggins
Defensive Coordinators: Lyle Hemphill, Elijah Robinson • Location: College Station, Texas • Stadium: Kyle Field (102,733)

MARCEL REED

SCOUTING THE AGGIES

"I always thought [QB Marcel Reed] was a great athlete. Respect him, but I always judge those guys on, 'Do they win those big games? Are they the main difference?' He's got a year under his belt, but there's gonna be more pressure on him facing the top half of the league and not have it just come down to the Texas game at the end. ... Mike Elko is a real-deal ball coach. The way they carry themselves, the way they compete, how physical they are on both sides of the line of scrimmage. They play complete team football. You watch them and you see the way they handle adversity at times throughout the season — that doesn't just happen unless you've got a culture."

— An opposing SEC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)

WR	1	**MARIO CRAVER (JR.)**	6	Terry Bussey (Jr.)
WR	8	**ASHTON BETHEL-ROMAN (SO.)**	18	TK Norman (Fr.)
WR	7	Isaiah Horton* (Sr.)	3	Aaron Gregory (Fr.)
LT	71	Tyree Adams* (Jr.)	70	Robert Bourdon (So.)
LG	78	Coen Echols* (So.)	77	Tyler Thomas (Fr.)
C	54	**MARK NABOU JR. (SR.)**	73	Ashton Funk (So.)
RG	76	Trovon Baugh* (Sr.)	52	Blake Ivy (So.)
RT	75	Wilkin Formby* (Sr.)	79	Lamont Rogers (Fr.)
TE	84	Richie Anderson* (Jr.)	87	Houston Thomas* (Sr.)
QB	10	**MARCEL REED (JR.)**	13	Brady Hart (Fr.)
RB	4	Rueben Owens II (Jr.)	2	Jamarion Morrow (So.)

DEFENSE (5)

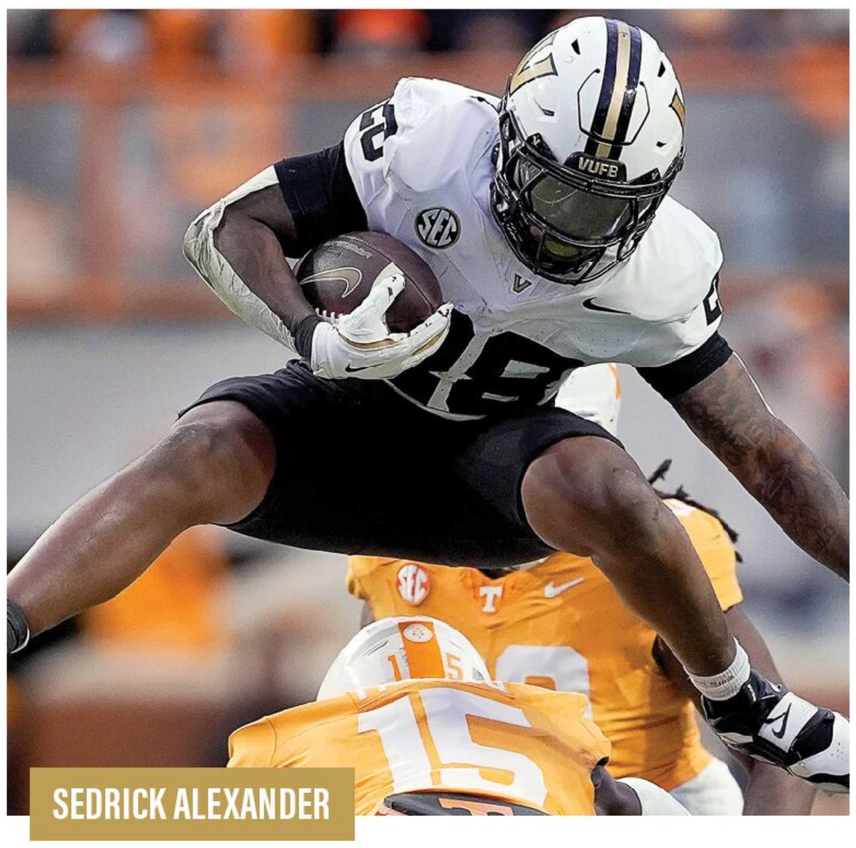
DE	10	Marco Jones (So.)	14	Anto Saka* (Sr.)
DT	5	DJ Hicks (Sr.)	11	Brandon Davis-Swain* (So.)
DT	92	CJ Mims* (Sr.)	99	Landon Rink (So.)
DE	18	**T.J. SEARCY (SR.)**	17	Ryan Henderson* (Sr.)
LB	21	Ray Coney* (Sr.)	54	Jordan Lockhart (Jr.)
LB	27	**DAYMION SANFORD (SR.)**	0	Noah Mikhail (So.)
NB	8	Jordan Shaw (Jr.)	1	Bryce Anderson (Sr.)
CB	2	**DEZZ RICKS (JR.)**	20	Adonyss Currie (Fr.)
CB	9	Rickey Gibson III* (Sr.)	6	Julio Humphrey (Sr.)
S	3	**MARCUS RATCLIFFE (SR.)**	4	Tawfiq Byard* (Jr.)
S	7	**DALTON BROOKS (SR.)**	13	Myles Davis (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	24	David Olano* (Sr.)	KR	6 Terry Bussey (Jr.)
P	37	Tyler White (Jr.)	PR	1 Mario Craver (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

JEROME MIRON-IMAGN IMAGES



SEDRICK ALEXANDER

SCOUTING THE COMMODORES

"Do I think they'll be as good without Diego [Pavia]? No. Absolutely not. Do I think they'll be competitive and in there somewhere in the middle? Yes. That time with Diego will help them recruit at a higher level, and they'll have more sustained success than they've had, but they won't be at the same level in the next year or two without Diego. I think the injection of belief and swag that [Pavia] brought to the program can carry over. They fed off it, then it became more than just him. ... [Offensive coordinator] Tim Beck does such a great job of being so fundamentally sound in what they do. There's repetitiveness of technique and play-calling, but there's multiplicity in the pre-snap looks and the pre-snap motions that makes it a complete pain."

— An opposing SEC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)

WR	**0**	**JUNIOR SHERRILL (SR.)**	17	Cole Adams* (Sr.)
WR	14	Ja'Cory Thomas* (Jr.)	9	Brycen Coleman (Jr.)
LT	75	Beau Johnson* (Jr.)	72	Mitchell Smith (Fr.)
LG	**70**	**CADE MCCONNELL (SR.)**	65	Micah DeBose* (So.)
C	56	Lyndon Cooper* (Sr.)	78	Keegan Wechsler (Sr.)
RG	58	Orion Irving (Sr.)	50	Gunner Givens (Sr.)
RT	51	Clinton Azubuike (Jr.)	62	CJ Williams (Jr.)
TE	**16**	**COLE SPENCE (SR.)**	45	Maurice Veney* (Jr.)
TE	18	Jayvontay Conner* (Jr.)	12	Walter Taylor* (Sr.)
QB	2	Jared Curtis (Fr.)	1	Blaze Berlowitz (Sr.)
RB	**28**	**SEDRICK ALEXANDER (SR.)**	22	Makhilyn Young (Sr.)

DEFENSE (5)

DE	10	Brian Allen Jr.* (Sr.)	17	Edwin Kolenge* (Sr.)
DT	5	Yilanan Ouattara (Sr.)	99	Talan Carter* (So.)
DT	**53**	**GLENN SEABROOKS III (JR.)**	92	Jaylon Stone (Sr.)
DE	**29**	**MILES CAPERS (SR.)**	32	Mason Carter (Jr.)
ILB	**11**	**BRYAN LONGWELL (SR.)**	20	Jamison Curtis (Jr.)
ILB	24	Nick Rinaldi (Sr.)	22	Bryce Cowan (Sr.)
CB	**4**	**MARTEL HIGHT (SR.)**	26	Cayden Daniels (So.)
CB	6	Jordan Matthews (Sr.)	2	Jaylin Lackey (Jr.)
STAR	14	Jailen Ruth (Jr.)	3	Carson Lawrence (So.)
S	**8**	**CJ HEARD (JR.)**	12	Vanzale Hinton (So.)
S	7	Ricardo Jones* (Jr.)	1	Dontae Carter (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	88	Brock Taylor (Sr.)	**KR**	0 Junior Sherrill (Sr.)
P		Tyler Ebel* (Sr.)	**PR**	4 Martel Hight (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

MARK ZALESKI

VANDERBILT COMMODORES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 45 | SEC PREDICTION: 14 | 2025 RECORD: 10-3, 6-2 SEC

OFFENSE What does life without Diego Pavia look like for Vanderbilt? That's the big question with true freshman Jared Curtis expected to win the Commodores' starting job. Vandy pulled off an all-time stunner by flipping the 5-star recruit from his commitment to Georgia, and early buzz suggests Curtis is at least as good as advertised. But the fact remains that Curtis has zero game experience at the college level.

Only six returning SEC players racked up more receiving yards than wideout Junior Sherrill (784 yards, seven TDs) last year, and the Commodores added a couple of impact transfers: Ja'Cory Thomas from Old Dominion and Cole Adams from Alabama, the latter of whom turned heads during spring practice. Tight end should be a strength with Cole Spence returning, while East Carolina transfer Jayvontay Conner takes over for Mackey Award winner Eli Stowers in the Commodores' flex role.

An improved offensive line boosted the run game last season, but Vandy has to replace four starters. Pairing an unproven line with a freshman quarterback feels risky.

DEFENSE Vandy's defense features myriad familiar faces, with seven players who have served as full-time starters at the Power 4 level.

Pass defense has never been a strength under head coach Clark Lea, although Vandy took a step forward there last year. The rush remains a concern with projected starting edges Miles Capers and Brian Allen Jr., a transfer from Iowa, having combined for just five sacks in 2025.

A deep group of tackles and an experienced linebacker corps led by Bryan Longwell should make for a competitive run defense. The secondary, however, is where Vandy could take a big step forward with Jordan Matthews and Cayden Daniels emerging at cornerback, while Martel Hight rejoins the defense full-time after playing some wideout in 2025. Clemson transfer Ricardo Jones should improve the Commodores' back end after he tied for the ACC lead with six interceptions last fall.

SPECIALISTS Vandy's special teams have ranked among the nation's best according to metrics like SP+ over the past two years, and that should continue thanks to continuity and a solid pickup via the transfer portal in punter Tyler Ebel (FCS South Dakota). Brock Taylor is one of college football's top placekickers and has range to 60-plus yards if necessary.

FINAL ANALYSIS Despite efforts to assemble an experienced supporting cast, Vandy has questions to answer. A potentially improved defense could help ensure that Curtis isn't regularly facing huge deficits, but there are likely to be growing pains. If Curtis has a true freshman campaign similar to Trevor Lawrence's at Clemson in 2018, that would change the outlook.

2025 RESULTS (10-3, 6-2 SEC)

Aug. 30	Charleston Southern	W	45-3
Sept. 6	at Virginia Tech	W	44-20
Sept. 13	at South Carolina	W	31-7
Sept. 20	Georgia State	W	70-21
Sept. 27	Utah State	W	55-35
Oct. 4	at Alabama	L	14-30
Oct. 18	LSU	W	31-24
Oct. 25	Missouri	W	17-10
Nov. 1	at Texas	L	31-34
Nov. 8	Auburn (ot)	W	45-38
Nov. 22	Kentucky	W	45-17
Nov. 29	at Tennessee	W	45-24
Dec. 31	vs. Iowa #	L	27-34

#Reliaquest Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	Austin Peay
Sept. 12	Delaware
Sept. 19	NC State
Sept. 26	at Auburn
Oct. 3	at Georgia
Oct. 10	Ole Miss
Oct. 17	Arkansas
Oct. 24	at Kentucky
Nov. 7	at Mississippi State
Nov. 14	Alabama
Nov. 21	at Florida
Nov. 28	Tennessee

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Jared Curtis, QB	★★★★★
2.	Mitchell Smith, OT	★★★★
3.	Collin Flanigan, CB	★★★★
4.	Evan Hampton, RB	★★★★
5.	Chris Tangelo, ATH	★★★
6.	Bradley Brown, S	★★★
7.	Adam Gehm, TE	★★★
8.	Daniel Vollmer Jr., LB	★★★
9.	Jace McCallum, EDGE	★★★
10.	Owen Cabell, WR	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Clark Lea • Record at School: 26-36 (5 years) • Career Record: 26-36 (5 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Tim Beck
Defensive Coordinator: Steve Gregory • Location: Nashville, Tenn. • Stadium: FirstBank Stadium (35,000)

SBC SUN BELT PREVIEW

PREDICTED ORDER OF FINISH

EAST

1. JAMES MADISON DUKES
2. OLD DOMINION MONARCHS
3. MARSHALL THUNDERING HERD
4. GEORGIA SOUTHERN EAGLES
5. APPALACHIAN STATE MOUNTAINEERS
6. COASTAL CAROLINA CHANTICLEERS
7. GEORGIA STATE PANTHERS

WEST

1. TROY TROJANS
2. ARKANSAS STATE RED WOLVES
3. LOUISIANA TECH BULLDOGS
4. LOUISIANA RAGIN' CAJUNS
5. SOUTH ALABAMA JAGUARS
6. SOUTHERN MISS GOLDEN EAGLES
7. ULM WARHAWKS

SUN BELT CHAMPIONSHIP

TROY OVER JAMES MADISON

ALL-SUN BELT TEAM

FIRST-TEAM OFFENSE		
QB	GOOSE CROWDER	Troy
RB	DEVIN ROCHE	Old Dominion
RB	JAQUARI LEWIS	Appalachian State
AP	DEVIN SPENCER	Arkansas State
WR	CHAUNCY COBB	Arkansas State
WR	JOSH DALLAS	Georgia Southern
WR	SHELTON SAMPSON JR.	Louisiana
TE	TOBY PAYNE	Marshall
C	ZACH GREENBERG	James Madison
OL	JALEN SLAPPY	Marshall
OL	TRISTIAN SMITH	Arkansas State
OL	KADEN MOREAU	Louisiana
OL	JORDON JONES	Troy

FIRST-TEAM DEFENSE		
DL	DONNIE SMITH	Troy
DL	AMAR THOMAS	James Madison
DL	CHRIS FORBES	Old Dominion
LB	KOLBE FIELDS	Louisiana Tech
LB	MJ STROUD	Georgia Southern
LB	COLTON PHARES	Appalachian State
LB	NOAH FLEMMINGS	ULM
LB	ANTHONY BYNUM	Georgia Southern
CB	CHANCE GAMBLE	Georgia Southern
CB	BRENT GORDON JR.	Louisiana
S	DAYTIONE SMITH	Marshall
S	MARIO EASTERLY	Old Dominion

FIRST-TEAM SPECIALISTS		
K	CLUNE VAN ANDEL	Arkansas State
P	EVAN CRENSHAW	Troy
KR	CHAUNCY COBB	Arkansas State
PR	DEVIN ROCHE	Old Dominion

BOWL PROJECTIONS

Salute to Veterans: Georgia Southern vs. Delaware

68 Ventures: Arkansas State vs. Jacksonville State

Xbox: Old Dominion vs. Utah State

Myrtle Beach: Marshall vs. Liberty

Boca Raton: Troy vs. Miami (Ohio)

New Orleans: James Madison vs. WKU

Frisco: Louisiana Tech vs. Central Michigan

JOIN COLLEGE FOOTBALL EXPERT STEVEN LASSAN AT ATHLONSPORTS.COM FOR A LOOK AT SECOND- AND THIRD-TEAM SELECTIONS

CRAIG STROBECK-IMAGN IMAGES

COORDINATOR CAROUSEL

APPALACHIAN STATE
Offense: New: Mike Anthony
Old: Dowell Loggains

ARKANSAS STATE
Offense: New: Garrett Altman
Old: Keith Heckendorf

COASTAL CAROLINA
Offense: New: Nick Petrino
Old: Drew Hollingshead
Defense: New: L.D. Scott
Old: Jeremiah Johnson

GEORGIA SOUTHERN
Defense: New: Mike Mutz
Old: Brandon Bailey

GEORGIA STATE
Defense: New: Cam Clark, John Hane-line; Old: Travis Pearson

JAMES MADISON
Offense: New: Cam Aiken
Old: Dean Kennedy
Defense: New: Robert Bala, Josh Linam
Old: Colin Hitschler

LOUISIANA TECH
Offense: New: Nathan Young
Old: Tony Franklin

MARSHALL
Defense: New: Brad Lambert
Old: Shannon Morrison

OLD DOMINION
Offense: New: Kody Cook
Old: Kevin Decker

SOUTH ALABAMA
Offense: New: Major Applewhite
Old: Paul Petrino
Defense: New: Todd Orlando, Jason Washington; Old: Will Windham

SOUTHERN MISS
Offense: New: Kyle Cefalo
Old: Blake Anderson
Defense: New: Joe Bolden
Old: Jason Semore

TROY
Offense: New: Adam Austin
Old: Sean Reagan

ULM
Offense: New: Jesse Montalto
Old: Bryant Vincent
Defense: New: Troy Reffett
Old: Earnest Hill

GOOSE CROWDER, TROY
MAX JOHNSON, GEORGIA SOUTHERN

TOP TRANSFERS

	NAME	POS.	SCHOOL	FORMER SCHOOL
1.	**Max Johnson**	QB	Georgia Southern	North Carolina
	He's on school No. 4 and season No. 7 with 6,000-plus yards of total offense to his name.			
2.	**Trey Owens**	QB	Arkansas State	Texas
	Owens is a prolific passer and blue-chip talent who's replacing a three-year starter.			
3.	**Malachi Singleton**	QB	Appalachian State	Purdue
	The Mountaineers are betting on Singleton's talent and mobility.			
4.	**Rashon Myles Jr.**	LB	Georgia Southern	Abilene Christian
	Myles earned FCS All-America honors, racking up 100-plus tackles in the process.			
5.	**Jeremiah Harrison**	WR	James Madison	ETSU
	Harrison quickly made a name for himself in the FCS with his field-stretching abilities.			
6.	**Donovan Grayson**	DL	Coastal Carolina	Samford
	Grayson lived in the backfield in the FCS, earning All-SoCon honors and FBS interest.			
7.	**Xavier Bausley**	OL	Marshall	West Virginia
	Bausley brings size and starting experience to anchor the Thundering Herd's O-line.			
8.	**Five Hamilton**	DB	Arkansas State	Kennesaw State
	A key contributor for the CUSA champs, Hamilton adds secondary stability.			
9.	**Arrington Maiden**	QB	James Madison	Memphis
	Maiden has big shoes to fill for the Dukes, but he brings a rocket arm to the table.			
10.	**Donald Chaney Jr.**	RB	ULM	Charlotte
	Seventh-year senior with P4 experience and 1,000-plus career yards from scrimmage.			

RECRUITING RANKINGS BY SCHOOL

1. Appalachian State (62)
2. South Alabama (75)
3. James Madison (81)
4. Troy (83)
5. Old Dominion (89)
6. Georgia Southern (90)
7. Arkansas State (92)
8. Louisiana (95)
9. Louisiana Tech (96)
10. Georgia State (98)
11. Southern Miss (107)
12. Coastal Carolina (112)
13. Marshall (121)
14. ULM (124)

Rankings per Rivals; National ranking in parentheses

GAMES TO WATCH

Sept. 5 Liberty at James Madison
Sept. 5 Arkansas State at Memphis
Sept. 19 James Madison at San Diego St.
Sept. 19 East Carolina at Old Dominion
Sept. 26 James Madison at Old Dominion
Oct. 10 Louisiana at Louisiana Tech
Oct. 15 Ga. Southern at Old Dominion
Oct. 17 Arkansas State at Southern Miss
Oct. 17 Troy at Louisiana
Oct. 29 Troy at James Madison
Nov. 21 Georgia Southern at Troy
Nov. 28 Louisiana Tech at Ga. Southern

TOP 10 RECRUITS

	NAME	POS.	SCHOOL	RATING	NAT. RANK
1.	Jordan Harris	EDGE	Appalachian State	★★★	434
2.	Jamel Howse	TE	Appalachian State	★★★	507
3.	Maxwell Robinson	IOL	Georgia State	★★★	552
4.	Xavier McDonald	WR	James Madison	★★★	566
5.	Micah Williams	S	App State	★★★	747
6.	Kamden Jennings	CB	James Madison	★★★	777
7.	Chauncey Davis Jr.	CB	Southern Miss	★★★	814
8.	Kamauri Austin	WR	Appalachian State	★★★	834
9.	Manny Lewis	DL	Appalachian State	★★★	848
10.	Keivay Foster	S	Troy	★★★	863

Rankings per Rivals industry ranking.

FROM LEFT: JAKE CRANDALL/ ADVERTISER; MARK KOLBENEZNY-IMAGN IMAGES

APPALACHIAN STATE MOUNTAINEERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 117 | SUN BELT EAST PREDICTION: 5 | 2025 RECORD: 5-8, 2-6 SBC

OFFENSE The Mountaineers finished in the bottom third of the Sun Belt offensively last season, averaging only 24.2 points per game while turning the ball over 22 times, including 15 interceptions. To improve production, head coach Dowell Loggains will turn to a new starting quarterback via the transfer portal. App State added Malachi Singleton, Henry Hasselbeck and Tommy Ulatowski to the roster, with Singleton and Hasselbeck battling for the starting job. Singleton previously played at Arkansas and Purdue, making 11 appearances for the Boilermakers last season. The redshirt junior's dual-threat ability should boost App State's offense.

The running game looks good with Jaquari Lewis back for his sophomore season after rushing for 618 yards and six touchdowns in 2025.

Wide receivers Sam Mbake and Alex Sanchez need to increase their production after combining for 33 catches a year ago. Portal additions Chris Lofton and Dazmin James will help in major ways. Lofton led the FCS Big South with 934 receiving yards at Gardner-Webb last season.

The offensive line needs Tyriq Poindexter and Trent Ramsey to return to starting form after injuries cut their seasons short a year ago.

DEFENSE After surrendering 416.6 yards per game, App State seeks more consistency. Productive years from edge rushers Aiden Benton and Caleb Sandstrom are essential. The Mountaineers are also counting on linebacker Colton Phares, the team leader with 101 tackles and three interceptions last season. He'll need help in the middle from portal additions Alex Mitchell (Middle Tennessee) and Carson Sloan (FCS Samford).

The secondary needs a big season from cornerback Juan Berchal, who gained valuable experience as a freshman. Junior Ja'Den McBurrows can be a playmaker if he is fully healed from the injury that cost him most of last season. A host of transfers, including former ACC players Joe Reddish (Virginia Tech) and Khalil Conley (North Carolina), will be pivotal to App State's fortunes here.

SPECIALISTS In 2024, James London kicked six field goals of 50 yards or more for FCS Murray State and was a third-team FCS All-American. He was at Pitt prior to last season but left the team in August after losing a kicking competition. Punting is questionable as sophomore Jaxson Dunn, an Arkansas State transfer, has never played at the college level.

FINAL ANALYSIS A renowned giant-killer (hello, Michigan), App State started its FBS existence in 2014 and reeled off eight consecutive winning seasons. But the Mountaineers have had only one winning season in the past four. To reverse the slide, App State needs instant impact from the transfer additions and a strong return from injuries for several players.

2025 RESULTS (5-8, 2-6 SBC)

Aug. 29	at Charlotte	W	34-11
Sept. 6	Lindenwood	W	20-13
Sept. 13	at Southern Miss	L	22-38
Sept. 27	at Boise State	L	14-47
Oct. 4	Oregon State	W	27-23
Oct. 11	at Georgia State	W	41-20
Oct. 18	Coastal Carolina	L	37-45
Oct. 25	at Old Dominion	L	21-24
Nov. 6	Georgia Southern	L	23-25
Nov. 15	at James Madison	L	10-58
Nov. 22	Marshall	W	26-24
Nov. 29	Arkansas State	L	29-30
Dec. 29	vs. Georgia Southern #L		10-29

#Birmingham Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	Maine
Sept. 12	at East Carolina
Sept. 19	Charlotte
Sept. 26	at NC State
Oct. 10	Old Dominion
Oct. 16	at Coastal Carolina
Oct. 22	James Madison
Oct. 31	at Georgia Southern
Nov. 7	Georgia State
Nov. 14	at Marshall
Nov. 21	ULM
Nov. 28	at South Alabama

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Jordan Harris, EDGE	★★★★
2.	Micah Williams, S	★★★
3.	Caden Muskus, OT	★★★
4.	Jamel Howse, TE	★★★
5.	Kamauri Austin, WR	★★★
6.	Manny Lewis, DL	★★★
7.	Bronzden Chaffin, QB	★★★
8.	Nate Branch, WR	★★★
9.	Scottland Dover, IOL	★★★
10.	Eisa Evans, OT	★★★

*Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Dowell Loggains • Record at School: 5-8 (1 year)
Career Record: 5-8 (1 year) • Offensive Coordinator: Mike Anthony
Defensive Coordinator: DJ Smith • Location: Boone, N.C.
Stadium: Kidd Brewer Stadium (30,000)

JAQUARI LEWIS

SCOUTING THE MOUNTAINEERS

"I think football purists want them to be good, and they want them to be what App State is known to be. In recent history, I don't know that the wins and expectations have met. It's about coming to grips with this new world of college football, where you almost start with an entirely new team. ... The transition [last year] of a new head coach, trying to understand the Sun Belt, which is a very tough conference, you're trying to get the pieces in place. I know they had some first-year growing pains. They got banged up in a few spots; they lost a quarterback like [UCLA/Tennessee transfer] Joey Aguilar. That's not easy. But I think there's enough pride with the people in those buildings that they should be able to turn it around this year."

— An opposing Sun Belt assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (2)

WR	6	Chris Lofton* (Jr.)	89	Zach Taylor* (So.)
WR	9	Dazmin James* (Jr.)	80	Doopah Coleman (So.)
WR	12	Sam Mbake (Sr.)	16	Alex Sanchez (So.)
LT	65	Mac Walters* (Sr.)	75	Greydon Grimes (So.)
LG	78	Tyriq Poindexter (Sr.)	70	Big Al Oliver (Fr.)
C	**52**	**CAYDEN SWEATT (JR.)**	56	Jayden Thomas (So.)
RG	**67**	**TRENT RAMSEY (SR.)**	68	Lance Williams (Jr.)
RT	74	Kamron Burris* (Jr.)	57	Devon Manuel* (Sr.)
TE	7	Darrin Fugitt* (Sr.)	87	Dillon Galloway (So.)
QB	3	Malachi Singleton* (Jr.)	8	Henry Hasselbeck* (So.)
RB	5	Jaquari Lewis (So.)	20	J'Marion Burnette* (Jr.)

DEFENSE (2)

EDGE	41	Caleb Sandstrom (Jr.)	94	Caleb Pitts (So.)
DT	50	Jehchys Brown* (Jr.)	45	Nick Campbell (Sr.)
DT	99	Aaron Clark* (So.)	95	Ki'Shawn Harvey* (Jr.)
DE	**33**	**AIDEN BENTON (JR.)**	44	Manny Lewis (Fr.)
LB	**10**	**COLTON PHARES (JR.)**	5	Carson Sloan* (Jr.)
LB	15	Alex Mitchell* (Sr.)	13	Keshawn Thomas* (Sr.)
CB	0	Juan Berchal (So.)	6	Khalil Conley* (So.)
CB	24	Josh Williams (Jr.)	21	Joe Reddish* (Jr.)
STAR	1	Ja'Den McBurrows (Jr.)	4	Jakob Gude* (So.)
SS	12	Cary Grant* (Sr.)	25	Kaleb Purdy* (Sr.)
FS	27	Cam Fleming (Jr.)	7	Devin Henderson* (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	83	James London* (Jr.)	KR	13	Jackson Grier (Jr.)
P	40	Jaxson Dunn* (So.)	PR	13	Jackson Grier (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

JIM DEDMON-IMAGN IMAGES

ROBBY WASHINGTON

PAUL KARGE/THE SHREVEPORT TIMES

SCOUTING THE CHANTICLEERS

"[New head coach Ryan Beard] definitely has everyone's attention after the job he did at Missouri State. I don't know that we as a program go, 'Hey, we've gotta look out for Coastal.' That's not how we operate, but seeing some crossover film of what [Beard's Missouri State team] did last year, they did everything well. It almost seemed like our guys got a sense of comfort watching what Missouri State did well [to our mutual opponent] on film. ... He's done a nice job. He's earned this opportunity. The length of time that it took him to flip Missouri State, that's definitely a testament to his ability to coach, call plays, get guys motivated and get guys ready to play."

— An opposing Sun Belt assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (1)

WR	1	Robby Washington (Jr.)	6	Krosse Johnson* (So.)
WR	18	Clayton Coppock Jr.* (So.)	14	Colton Hinton (Sr.)
WR	0	Karmello English (Sr.)	3	Tristian Gardner* (So.)
LT	54	Gavin McLaughlin (So.)	70	Daniel Jones (Jr.)
LG	76	Cristian Loaiza* (Sr.)	72	Dominic Rijos (So.)
C	58	Apisa Poumele* (Sr.)	52	Gabe Jones (Fr.)
RG	66	Kain McDonald (So.)	50	Nasir Jones (Fr.)
RT	68	Mason Barton* (Jr.)	56	Tray Franklin (Sr.)
TE	**33**	**ZACH COURTNEY (SR.)**	9	Cyrus Ellison* (Sr.)
QB	2	Deuce Bailey* (Fr.)	12	Osiris Lopez (Fr.)
RB	23	Dominic Knicely (So.)	25	Jaden Allen-Hendrix* (So.)

DEFENSE (4)

DE	40	Chandavian Bradley* (Jr.)	52	Ibrahim Diawara (Sr.)
DT	35	Xzavier Booker* (Jr.)	98	Desmond Barnes* (So.)
DT	90	Reggie Jean* (Sr.)	92	Ahmad Poole* (Sr.)
DE	94	Donovan Grayson* (Jr.)	93	Obinna Onwuka (So.)
LB	34	Wyatt Gedeon (Sr.)	4	Marcellius Pulliam* (Jr.)
LB	**55**	**TRAY BROWN (SR.)**	39	Jordan Thompson* (Jr.)
HUSKY	**19**	**SE'VON MCDOWELL (JR.)**		Jesse Powell II* (Sr.)
CB	**2**	**JA'MARION WAYNE (SR.)**	36	Damill Bostic Jr.* (So.)
CB	**14**	**MYLES WOODS (JR.)**	8	Gabe White* (Jr.)
S	12	Dre Pinckney (Sr.)	17	Chris Henry (So.)
S	6	Jalen Lee* (Sr.)	25	Brandon Rose (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	30	Nico Cavanillas Alti* (Sr.)	KR	6 Krosse Johnson* (So.)
P	29	Emile Sebafundi (Sr.)	PR	1 Robby Washington (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** · *2026 TRANSFER

COASTAL CAROLINA CHANTICLEERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 119 | SUN BELT EAST PREDICTION: 6 | 2025 RECORD: 6-7, 5-3 SBC

OFFENSE New head coach Ryan Beard has brought offensive coordinator Nick Petrino with him from Missouri State. Petrino runs a pro-style offense with the quarterback often under center.

No Chanticleers QB is returning from 2025. The contestants for the job include redshirt freshman Missouri State transfer Deuce Bailey, Arkansas redshirt sophomore transfer Trever Jackson, junior-college transfer Tre Guerra and freshman Osiris Lopez, the high school touchdown pass record-holder in Massachusetts. All four have run-pass versatility.

Running back Dominic Knicely, wide receiver Robby Washington and tight end Zach Courtney are the most impactful returning skill-position players. Kennesaw State transfer Clayton Coppock Jr. and tight end Cyrus Ellison from FCS South Carolina State figure to be featured targets.

The offensive line features a number of offseason additions and must replace both starting tackles, who left for Power 4 programs.

DEFENSE New defensive coordinator L.D. Scott, who also arrived from Missouri State, believes that his defensive line will be the strength of his base 4-3 unit. Oklahoma State transfer Chandavian Bradley, Samford transfer Donovan Grayson and senior Ibrahim Diawara are expected to pressure the quarterback at defensive end, while largely experienced transfers will man the interior of the line.

Linebackers Tray Brown, Wyatt Gedeon and Se'Von McDowell return, and junior Marcellius Pulliam transferred in from Michigan State.

Cornerbacks Ja'Marion Wayne and Myles Woods return after being among the 2025 stats leaders in the secondary. FCS South Dakota State transfer safety Jalen Lee is a welcome addition.

SPECIALISTS A pair of FCS transfers, Nico Cavanillas Alti (South Carolina State) and Daniel Porto (Florida A&M), are vying for the placekicking job. Both were 2025 all-conference selections. Punter Emile Sebafundi returns after averaging 42.7 yards per punt with 15 inside the 20 and only four touchbacks. Washington and receivers Colton Hinton and Karmello English are punt return candidates. Arkansas transfer Krosse Johnson, Breyahn Townsend and Knicely have elite speed for kickoff returns.

FINAL ANALYSIS Beard led Missouri State to a 7-5 record in its first season at the FBS level. It's a young staff, as Beard, Petrino and Scott are all in their 30s. Beard has welcomed at least 56 incoming players, including at least 38 from the transfer portal, 13 high school signees and five juco transfers. He also has an entirely new coaching staff, many of them following him from Missouri State. The incoming players and new staff members will largely determine CCU's fate this season.

2025 RESULTS (6-7, 5-3 SBC)

Aug. 30	at Virginia	L	7-48
Sept. 6	Charleston Southern	W	13-0
Sept. 13	East Carolina	L	0-38
Sept. 20	at South Alabama	W	38-20
Oct. 4	at Old Dominion	L	7-47
Oct. 11	ULM	W	23-8
Oct. 18	at Appalachian State	W	45-37
Oct. 30	Marshall	W	44-27
Nov. 8	Georgia State	W	40-27
Nov. 15	at Georgia Southern	L	40-45
Nov. 22	at South Carolina	L	7-51
Nov. 29	James Madison	L	10-59
Dec. 30	vs. Louisiana Tech #	L	14-23

#Independence Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	at West Virginia
Sept. 12	Fordham
Sept. 19	at Delaware
Sept. 24	Liberty
Oct. 3	Georgia Southern
Oct. 10	at Marshall
Oct. 16	Appalachian State
Oct. 31	at Georgia State
Nov. 7	Old Dominion
Nov. 14	Arkansas State
Nov. 21	at Louisiana
Nov. 28	at James Madison

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Zeke Marshall, S	★★★
2.	Osiris Lopez, QB	★★★
3.	Michael Knight, CB	★★★
4.	Kadarus Hainsworth, WR	★★★
5.	Travis Roman, CB	★★★
6.	Stephan Aristil, OT	★★★
7.	Gabe Jones, IOL	★★★
8.	Aiden Parker, LB	★★★
9.	Nasir Jones, IOL	★★★
10.	Jayden Johnson, WR	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Ryan Beard • Record at School: First Season
Career Record: 19-16 (3 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Nick Petrino
Defensive Coordinator: L.D. Scott • Location: Conway, S.C.
Stadium: Brooks Stadium (21,000)

GEORGIA SOUTHERN EAGLES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 102 | SUN BELT EAST PREDICTION: 4 | 2025 RECORD: 7-6, 4-4 SBC

OFFENSE Whatever other concerns the Eagles have about their new quarterback, resilience isn't one of them: After six turbulent years at LSU, Texas A&M and North Carolina, 24-year-old journeyman Max Johnson has endured just about every trial big-time college football has to offer. Johnson still has another year to burn, which he opted to spend in his home state. Even if he goes the distance as QB1, there should be plenty of reps reserved for heir apparent Weston Bryan, who accounted for six touchdowns on just 49 snaps as a freshman.

The skill positions suffered significant graduation losses. Outgoing running back OJ Arnold left a 1,100-yard hole in the backfield to be filled by a homegrown committee of backs in at least their third year in the program. GSU invested its transfer portal capital on a fleet of Power 4 wideouts who never quite lived up to their recruiting rank at their previous stops. One name locals will recognize is Josh Dallas, a breakout candidate who missed nearly all of 2025 to a hip injury after hauling in a team-high six TD catches in 2024.

DEFENSE First-year coordinator Mike Mutz is charged with reviving a unit that ranked last in the Sun Belt in both total defense and yards per play allowed. The headliner is All-Sun Belt edge rusher MJ Stroud, and Mutz also inherited established players at defensive tackle (Caleb Moore and Latrell Bullard), linebacker (Brandon Tyson) and cornerback (Tracy Hill Jr. and Chance Gamble).

Like Mutz himself, most of the new arrivals come from the FCS ranks, including a handful of transfers he either coached or coached against during a three-year stint at Stephen F. Austin. Safety Aaron Sears was an all-conference pick at SFA, as was linebacker Rashon Myles Jr. at rival Abilene Christian.

SPECIALISTS Placekicker Tripp Bryant was reliable as a freshman, up to a point, connecting on 16-of-16 field-goal attempts from inside 40 yards. Beyond that point, he was just 2-of-5. Senior Alex Smith, a former Australian tennis pro, is back for his fourth year as the primary punter. There is some experience in the return game but not much proven juice.

FINAL ANALYSIS Clay Helton's tenure has been nondescript, yielding a 6-6 regular-season in three of his first four seasons and a 27-25 record overall. The good news in Year 5 is that the defense will almost certainly be improved, if only because there's not much room for it to get much worse. If the Eagles settle on a quarterback and a playmaker or two from the portal haul at wide receiver, a dark-horse run in the Sun Belt East is not out of the question. Otherwise, the outlook is more of the same.

JOSH DALLAS

SCOUTING THE EAGLES

"I would expect to see improvement. I know that we create some issues matchup-wise with our offensive personnel against them, and our scheme just naturally presents challenges for that defense. It was a perfect storm of things. ... They've been able to score points and move the ball. It almost seems like from an outside perspective, their philosophy is just to try and outscore everybody while getting enough stops. As in, can you keep up? It's just what it seems like they do at times. ... I love, love, love [UNC transfer quarterback] Max Johnson. He's awesome. Competitive. Smart. Tough. Built the right way. Loves ball, competes his a— off. He can spin it. He makes really good decisions with the ball."

— An opposing Sun Belt assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (1)					
WR	18	Andre Greene Jr.* (Sr.)	88	Alex Taylor* (So.)
WR	21	Ashton Hollins* (Sr.)	89	Noble Johnson* (Jr.)
WR	**19**	**JOSH DALLAS (SR.)**	85	Kam Mikell* (So.)
LT	64	Caelan Williams (Sr.)	51	Matthew Williams (Jr.)
LG	56	Mo Clipper Jr.* (Sr.)	72	Josh Raymond* (So.)
C	53	Ty Furnish (Sr.)	55	Ethan Williams (Jr.)
RG	65	Cole Norred* (So.)	75	Kingtriton Samuela (So.)
RT	63	Colin Alexander (So.)	77	Ike Turner (Fr.)
TE	87	River Helms (Sr.)	84	JP Mikhael (Jr.)
QB	7	Max Johnson* (Sr.)	9	Weston Bryan (So.)
RB	6	David Mbadinga (Sr.)	20	Terrance Gibbs (Sr.)
DEFENSE (4)				
DE	4	Anthony Bynum* (Jr.)	51	Kebba Secka (Jr.)
NT	**57**	**LATRELL BULLARD (SR.)**	90	O'Marion Brown* (Jr.)
DT	**93**	**CALEB MOORE (JR.)**	94	Elijah Fears (So.)
OLB	18	MJ Stroud (Sr.)	49	Festus Davies* (Sr.)
ILB	**1**	**BRANDON TYSON (SR.)**	15	Holden Trice (Jr.)
ILB	14	Rashon Myles Jr.* (Sr.)	30	CJ Allen Jr. (So.)
CB	**12**	**TRACY HILL JR. (SR.)**	20	Jaquari Brown (So.)
CB	38	Noah Mangham* (Sr.)	19	Fabo Chaney (So.)
NB	31	Chance Gamble (Sr.)	24	Phillip Gladney (So.)
SS	23	Jakyri Jones* (Sr.)	29	Devin Collier (So.)
FS	13	Aaron Sears* (Sr.)	32	Jaylen Bentley (So.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	95	Tripp Bryant (So.)	KR	16	Jamarian Samuel (Sr.)
P	25	Alex Smith (Sr.)	PR	24	Peyton Plott (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** · *2026 TRANSFER

2025 RESULTS (7-6, 4-4 SBC)

Aug. 30	at Fresno State	L	14-42
Sept. 6	at USC	L	20-59
Sept. 13	Jacksonville State	W	41-34
Sept. 20	Maine	W	45-17
Sept. 27	at James Madison	L	10-35
Oct. 9	Southern Miss	L	35-38
Oct. 18	Georgia State	W	41-24
Oct. 25	at Arkansas State	L	24-34
Nov. 6	at Appalachian State	W	25-23
Nov. 15	Coastal Carolina	W	45-40
Nov. 22	Old Dominion	L	10-45
Nov. 29	at Marshall	W	24-19
Dec. 29	vs. Appalachian State #	W	29-10

#Birmingham Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	Charleston South.
Sept. 12	at Clemson
Sept. 19	at Jacksonville St.
Sept. 26	Houston
Oct. 3	at Coastal Carolina
Oct. 10	James Madison
Oct. 15	at Old Dominion
Oct. 31	Appalachian State
Nov. 7	Marshall
Nov. 14	at Georgia State
Nov. 21	at Troy
Nov. 28	Louisiana Tech

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Ty Cummings, RB	★★★
2.	JQ Crosby, TE	★★★
3.	Jayden Jackson, ATH	★★★
4.	RJ Isaac, CB	★★★
5.	Alec Upshaw, DL	★★★
6.	Max Haertel, S	★★★
7.	Tylin Drakeford, CB	★★★
8.	Dariyon Gordon, CB	★★★
9.	Jaden Johnson, OT	★★★
10.	Grady Howell, OT	★★★

*Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Clay Helton · Record at School: 27-25 (4 years)
Career Record: 73-49 (10+ years) · Offensive Coordinator: Ryan Aplin
Defensive Coordinator: Mike Mutz · Location: Statesboro, Ga.
Stadium: Allen E. Paulson Stadium (25,000)

TYLER KAUFMAN/GETTY IMAGES)

CAMERAN BROWN

SCOUTING THE PANTHERS

"They were scary from a roster standpoint last year. They had a guy like [receiver] Ted Hurst who could've played anywhere in the country. Personnel-wise, they were really, really good. What ended up happening when we played them was I don't know that the motivation was there once you got up on them, but it wasn't for a lack of talent and ability. Man to man, they were as good as anybody we played last year. ... They're coming off a rough year, but that quarterback, Cameran Brown, is coming back, and I thought he played well last year. They lost their top receiver [Hurst] and their top two running backs, but they've got a defensive end, Jabriel Rhodes-Nelson, that I think is due for a good year."

— An opposing Sun Belt assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)

WR	13	Derrick Avery Jr. (So.)	4	Kyle Washington (So.)
WR	10	DJ Riles (Sr.)	9	Chase Alan-Jackman (Sr.)
WR	19	Rodshaun Dorsey* (Jr.)	17	Isaiah Stone* (Fr.)
LT	76	Jordan Brown* (Sr.)	68	Peter Diaz* (Jr.)
LG	**52**	**DONOVAN FUNSCH (SR.)**	71	Aidan Andrews (Fr.)
C	**54**	**TYHLER WILLIAMS (SR.)**	75	Marcus Mascoll* (Fr.)
RG	**56**	**DEANDRE DUFFUS (JR.)**	72	Kelton Smith Jr.* (Jr.)
RT	77	Connor Jones* (Sr.)	73	Deylin Hasert* (Sr.)
TE	85	Grant Hollier (So.)	35	Avion McBride (Sr.)
QB	8	Cameran Brown (Sr.)	2	Ayden Pereira* (Sr.)
RB	34	Keith Adams Jr.* (Sr.)	5	Lanear McCrary Jr.* (Sr.)

DEFENSE (2)

DE	1	**JABRIEL RHODES-NELSON (SR.)**	40	Sir Mells (Sr.)
DT	58	Kelze Howard* (Jr.)	99	Mandjou Berte* (Sr.)
DT	92	AJ Vaughns* (Sr.)	91	Tyrese Cathey* (So.)
DE	4	Xavier Esquillen* (Sr.)	95	Richard Kramer (Jr.)
OLB	45	Kelan Butler (So.)	43	Zion Lawson (So.)
ILB	20	Coby Owens (Jr.)	9	Eric Butler Jr.* (Fr.)
ILB	34	Jaydon Hood* (Sr.)	27	Tyler Moore (So.)
CB	26	Jacorey Walker* (Jr.)	11	Toby Bolton* (Fr.)
CB	12	Darius Johnson Jr.* (Sr.)	35	Cade Dutton* (Fr.)
STAR	21	Derrick Maxey III (Jr.)	23	Braylon Alexander* (Sr.)
S	**7**	**DEUCE WALKER (JR.)**	8	Deuce Lee* (Sr.)
S	15	Tre Mittman* (Jr.)	35	Kyle Veasley (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K		Balint Vorosmarty (Fr.)	KR	18	D'Ontae Fulton (Fr.)
P	14	Christian Teeter* (Sr.)	PR	18	D'Ontae Fulton (Fr.)

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PETRE THOMAS-IMAGN IMAGES

GEORGIA STATE PANTHERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 132 | SUN BELT EAST PREDICTION: 7 | 2025 RECORD: 1-11, 0-8 SBC

OFFENSE After using three starting quarterbacks last season, the Panthers will start the season with Cameran Brown, who threw for 1,296 yards and ran for 271 last year. He was the most effective option when healthy, as evidenced by his 241 passing yards and four TDs against South Alabama. He'll be in competition with Ayden Pereira, a transfer from FCS Merrimack who threw for 1,818 yards and ran for 853 last year.

Georgia State lost record-setting receiver Ted Hurst to the NFL but returns DJ Riles and ascendant tight end Grant Hollier, who didn't get regular playing time until midseason and wound up with 21 catches and four TDs. Clemson transfer Keith Adams Jr. will get a shot at running back, a position that has been high on potential but low on production.

The line must stay healthy after allowing a Sun Belt-low 18 sacks for an offense that ranked 10th in the Sun Belt in total yards. Deandre Duffus and Tyhler Williams are the top returners, and Connor Jones, an import from Michigan, gets high marks.

DEFENSE The poor defense (448.8 ypg, 58 TDs allowed) forced a change in coordinators, with Cam Clark (Duke) and John Haneline (FCS Youngstown State) coming in as co-coordinators. They will try to construct a defense that will create more big plays and turnovers; GSU recovered only three fumbles and intercepted three passes, and the pass rush produced only 18 sacks.

End Jabriel Rhodes-Nelson got a chance to play late in the season and had 41 tackles — seventh-best on the team and the most among returning players. Safety Deuce Walker missed time but returned to collect 33 tackles. Much is expected from Jaydon Hood, a transfer linebacker from Michigan; defensive back Deuce Lee, a top tackler who came in from FCS Monmouth; and safety Tre Mittman, who had 75 tackles at FCS North Carolina A&T.

SPECIALISTS The Panthers hope a new crew will provide more consistency. Christian Teeter will handle the punting, and true freshman Balint Vorosmarty, whose kickoffs were 88.5% touchbacks in high school, should be the kicker. GSU ranked 13th in the Sun Belt in field-goal percentage (43.8%, 134th nationally) and eighth in net punting (37.8 yards).

FINAL ANALYSIS The Panthers have struggled in two seasons under head coach Dell McGee, going 3-9 and 1-11, and a combined 1-15 in the Sun Belt. That's a step back for a program that had been to a bowl game in five of the previous seven years. At least the schedule is easier. Gone are SEC opponents Ole Miss and Vanderbilt, replaced by FCS North Carolina AT&T, Atlanta-area rival Kennesaw State, UCF and Northern Illinois.

2025 RESULTS (1-11, 0-8 SBC)

Aug. 30	at Ole Miss	L	7-63
Sept. 6	Memphis	L	16-38
Sept. 13	Murray State	W	37-21
Sept. 20	at Vanderbilt	L	21-70
Oct. 4	James Madison	L	7-14
Oct. 11	Appalachian State	L	20-41
Oct. 18	at Georgia Southern	L	24-41
Oct. 23	South Alabama	L	31-38
Nov. 8	at Coastal Carolina	L	27-40
Nov. 15	Marshall	L	18-30
Nov. 22	at Troy	L	19-31
Nov. 29	at Old Dominion	L	10-27

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	North Carolina A&T
Sept. 12	at Kennesaw State
Sept. 19	at UCF
Sept. 26	Northern Illinois
Oct. 3	Old Dominion
Oct. 17	at James Madison
Oct. 24	at Arkansas State
Oct. 31	Coastal Carolina
Nov. 7	at Appalachian State
Nov. 14	Georgia Southern
Nov. 21	at Marshall
Nov. 28	Louisiana

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Maxwell Robinson, IOL	★★★
2.	Xavier Butler, RB	★★★
3.	Freddie Wilson, DL	★★★
4.	AJ Vaughns, DL	★★★
5.	Jacorey Walker, S	★★★
6.	Timothy Dailey, DL	★★★
7.	Kadorian Benjamin, IOL	★★★
8.	Kenneth Morgan III, TE	★★★
9.	Zach Stair, WR	★★★
10.	Tyrese Cathey, DL	★★★

**Per Rivals*

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Dell McGee • Record at School: 5-20 (2+ years) • Career Record: 5-20 (2+ years) • Offensive Coordinator: Hue Jackson • Defensive Coordinators: Cam Clark, John Haneline • Location: Atlanta, Ga. • Stadium: Center Parc Stadium (24,333)

JAMES MADISON DUKES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 82 | SUN BELT EAST PREDICTION: 1 | 2025 RECORD: 12-2, 8-0 SBC

OFFENSE After producing a string of Sun Belt Players of the Year at quarterback, James Madison enters its first season under new head coach Billy Napier with a four-way competition for the starting job. Transfer quarterbacks Arrington Maiden (Memphis) and Davi Belfort (UCF) both played sparingly as freshmen but came to JMU for an opportunity to start. Camden Coleman redshirted last season but has the most starting experience dating back to his time at FCS Richmond, while JC Evans enters his third year in the program. Evans has thrown only 21 passes in his career but was the Boca Raton Bowl MVP in 2024.

Wideout Braeden Wisloski should be a popular target for whoever starts. He's coming off a strong finish to last season, when he scored four touchdowns over the final six games.

DEFENSE Linebacker Gannon Weathersby is back in a bigger role after recording 57 tackles and a sack last season. Safety KJ Flowe is in a similar spot heading into his junior year after coming on strong late last season with a pick-6 against Coastal Carolina.

Amar Thomas is back after a great season at defensive end, and WKU transfer Chukwunedu Okeke, should start, but JMU looked largely to the lower levels to find defensive linemen early in the portal window. Division II transfers such as Kevin Roberts, Jakolbi Wilson and Mason Purham have an opportunity to play a lot up front, while Toledo transfer DJ Kelly might step right into the starting role at corner.

SPECIALISTS Placekicker Morgan Suarez and punter Patrick Rea are back after transferring to JMU last season and immediately earning the starting jobs. Rea punted 48 times for an average of 41 yards with a long of 61 and placed 16 inside the 20-yard line. Suarez didn't have a great start to the season but finished 14-of-19 on field goals and didn't have a miss inside 40 yards.

FINAL ANALYSIS Coming off a College Football Playoff appearance after only four seasons as an FBS program, the Dukes predictably had to reload. Napier replaced new UCLA head coach Bob Chesney, who took several JMU players with him hoping to replicate the national championship formula of fellow former JMU head coach Curt Cignetti at Indiana.

Napier returns to the Sun Belt after a failed stint at Florida, but he previously dominated the conference in four seasons at Louisiana. Much like his successful JMU predecessors, Napier's first recruiting class focused more on standouts from lower levels than Power 4 transfers. There are sure to be some growing pains, but Napier takes over a program where winning the Sun Belt is now the expectation.

2025 RESULTS (12-2, 8-0 SBC)

Aug. 30	Weber State	W	45-10
Sept. 5	at Louisville	L	14-28
Sept. 20	at Liberty	W	31-13
Sept. 27	Georgia Southern	W	35-10
Oct. 4	at Georgia State	W	14-7
Oct. 11	Louisiana	W	24-14
Oct. 18	Old Dominion	W	63-27
Oct. 28	at Texas State	W	52-20
Nov. 8	at Marshall	W	35-23
Nov. 15	Appalachian State	W	58-10
Nov. 22	Washington State	W	24-20
Nov. 29	at Coastal Carolina	W	59-10
Dec. 5	Troy #	W	31-14
Dec. 20	at Oregon %	L	34-51

#SBC Championship %CFB Playoff First Round

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	Liberty
Sept. 12	Wagner
Sept. 19	at San Diego State
Sept. 26	at Old Dominion
Oct. 3	Marshall
Oct. 10	at Georgia Southern
Oct. 17	Georgia State
Oct. 22	at Appalachian State
Oct. 29	Troy
Nov. 5	at Southern Miss
Nov. 14	at UConn
Nov. 28	Coastal Carolina

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Kaleb Smith, WR	★★★
2.	Xavier McDonald, WR	★★★
3.	Kamden Jennings, CB	★★★
4.	Josiah Perry, LB	★★★
5.	D'Kwan Thomas, S	★★★
6.	Elijah Moss, WR	★★★
7.	Kyle Bynes II, WR	★★★
8.	Trace Burney, WR	★★★
9.	Max Roche, TE	★★★
10.	Tanner Vibabul, QB	★★★

*Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Billy Napier • Record at School: First Season
Career Record: 62-35 (7+ years) • Offensive Coordinator: Cam Aiken
Defensive Coordinators: Robert Bala, Josh Linam • Location: Harrisonburg, Va.
Stadium: Bridgeport Stadium (24,877)

GANNON WEATHERSBY

SCOUTING THE DUKES

"As a university, they've done a good job finding what works for James Madison. They know how to support it. They know how to build it. For all the guys that aren't there, you still have a nucleus of people who only know a championship culture. The floor is going to be higher than other programs going through transitional years. ... I think [new head coach] Billy Napier is a really good coach, and they can get really good players there. It's a great location. The biggest thing with Napier will be proximity to that area. What does he know about it? That transition will be interesting. He did an awesome job at Louisiana and figuring it out there. His reputation as a coach is really strong. I would assume that he'll keep that thing rolling."

— An opposing Sun Belt assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (1)

WR	10	Braeden Wisloski (Sr.)	17	Michael Scott (So.)
WR	3	Corey Scott* (Jr.)	18	Kylan Billiot* (So.)
WR	8	Jeremiah Harrison* (So.)	2	Jayden Mines (Sr.)
LT	77	DJ Fox* (Sr.)		Frankie Tinilau* (Jr.)
LG	72	Kaedin Massey* (So.)	71	Deacon Rawls (So.)
C	**60**	**ZACH GREENBERG (SR.)**	70	Noel Portnjagin* (So.)
RG	56	Tyler Brown* (Sr.)	73	Evan Bushong (So.)
RT	53	Daniel Michel* (Jr.)	78	Josh Manecke* (So.)
TE	0	Cole Keller* (Sr.)	82	Thatcher Miller* (Sr.)
QB	5	Arrington Maiden* (So.)	7	Camden Coleman (Jr.)
RB	6	George Pettaway (Sr.)	23	Nick Herman* (So.)

DEFENSE (2)

DL	**8**	**AMAR THOMAS (SR.)**	0	Mason Purham* (Jr.)
DL	5	Kevin Roberts* (Jr.)	91	Jakolbi Wilson* (Sr.)
DL	10	Chukwunedu Okeke* (So.)	9	Kei'Trone Simpson* (Sr.)
OLB	26	Jayden Studio (So.)	15	JT Hooten* (So.)
ILB	**3**	**GANNON WEATHERSBY (SR.)**	11	Trashon Dye (So.)
ILB	12	Lathan Croley* (Jr.)	15	JT Hooten* (So.)
OLB	2	Nakian Jackson* (Sr.)	11	Trayshon Dye (So.)
CB	6	DJ Kelly* (So.)	36	Milt Ferguson (Jr.)
CB	1	Damier Minkah* (Jr.)	34	Jamal Olford (Fr.)
S	14	KJ Flowe (Jr.)	7	Javis Mynatt* (Sr.)
S	23	Ken Willis (Sr.)	20	Terrence Jones* (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	5	Morgan Suarez (Sr.)	KR	10	Braeden Wisloski (Sr.)
P	11	Patrick Rea (Sr.)	PR	17	Michael Scott (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • 2026 TRANSFER

JAMIE RHODES-IMAGN IMAGES

CARLOS DEL RIO-WILSON

SCOUTING THE THUNDERING HERD

"I think [head coach Tony Gibson] can turn it around. Based on what he walked into, you think you're inheriting a championship roster, and literally, you're starting over from scratch. There wasn't a lot left in the cupboard for him. That being said, he did a good job getting those pieces in place. They're tough, they play hard, they're gritty. They have a confidence about them no matter what their record says. ... They got a running back from [FCS] West Georgia, TJ Lester. I really like him. I watched him in high school, and I've always thought highly of him. I know they signed his little brother there, too. That's kind of how they were able to get him."

— An opposing Sun Belt assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR	**0**	**DE'ANDRE TAMAREZ (SR.)**	9	Christian Hamilton* (Jr.)
WR	**2**	**ADRIAN NORTON (SR.)**	3	Chris Culliver* (Jr.)
WR	20	Owen Sweeney* (So.)	5	Xayvion Turner-Bradshaw (Sr.)
LT	**76**	**TARIQ MONTGOMERY (SR.)**	67	Jack Laird (Fr.)
LG	64	Jaquez Joiner* (Fr.)	73	Robby Martin* (So.)
C	56	Andrew Dudley (Fr.)	54	Drake Lanham (Fr.)
RG	**70**	**JALEN SLAPPY (SR.)**	57	Logan Greer* (Jr.)
RT	78	Xavier Bausley* (Sr.)	65	Parker Brault (Fr.)
TE	**81**	**TOBY PAYNE (SR.)**	85	Tracy Stephens (Jr.)
QB	**7**	**CARLOS DEL RIO-WILSON (SR.)**	1	Zion Turner (Sr.)
RB	6	Jo'Shon Barbie (Sr.)	21	TJ Lester* (So.)

DEFENSE (3)

DE	58	Braydin Ward (Jr.)	36	Cole Funderburk* (Fr.)
NT	9	B.J. Carter* (Fr.)	24	Jacarius Clayton (Sr.)
DT	14	Mickel Williams* (Sr.)	98	Terry Nwabuisi-Ezeala* (Fr.)
LB	**5**	**JAVAE GILMORE (SR.)**	6	Jalen Marshall (Sr.)
LB	27	Cannon Lewis (So.)	10	Chason Clark (Jr.)
LB	1	Kelvon McBride* (Jr.)	47	EahJay McAdams (Fr.)
CB	2	Charles McCartherens* (Jr.)	8	Eddie Pleasant III* (Jr.)
CB	26	Brayden Hall* (Sr.)	7	TaShawn Jeter (Jr.)
NB	**11**	**JOSH PIERRE-LOUIS (SR.)**	4	Philipp Davis (Jr.)
S	**17**	**DAYTIONE SMITH (SR.)**	3	Terrente Hinton* (Sr.)
S	0	Caleb Clark-Glover (Jr.)	16	Kendall Anderson* (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	41	Jorge Diaz Nicolas* (Fr.)	**KR** 5	Xayvion Turner-Bradshaw (Sr.)
P	91	Cooper Heimbach (Fr.)	**PR** 26	Brayden Hall* (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

HELEN COMER/THE DAILY NEWS JOURNAL

MARSHALL THUNDERING HERD

NATIONAL FORECAST: 95 | SUN BELT EAST PREDICTION: 3 | 2025 RECORD: 5-7, 3-5 SBC

OFFENSE Last season, first-year head coach Tony Gibson assembled an offense that produced on par with the one that won the conference the previous season. The bones of that group are back, including quarterback Carlos Del Rio-Wilson, who led the Herd in rushing and was an efficient passer in a breakout campaign. Marshall's run-first offense revolves around its quarterback, but it utilizes multiple running backs. Look for Jo'Shon Barbie to assume a larger share of the carries, supplemented by transfer TJ Lester (FCS West Georgia).

Receivers De'Andre Tamarez and Adrian Norton are back, and tight end Toby Payne will start for the third consecutive season. Wideout Owen Sweeney (FCS VMI) also joined the fold after a breakout season. Wide receiver Christian Hamilton and guard Robby Martin are among the contingent that made the move from West Virginia to Marshall.

DEFENSE The Herd had one of the worst defenses in the Sun Belt last season, and P4 teams still picked off several of their top players in the portal. The front was decimated, as three of the top four sack leaders transferred out, and the team's top three tacklers graduated.

Javae Gilmore is the lone starting linebacker returning. Perhaps newcomers Kelvon McBride (NC State) and Mickel Williams (UTSA) can replace the lost pass-rushing production.

But the more pressing concern for new defensive coordinator Brad Lambert, who's back for his third stint at Marshall, is in the secondary. Only a handful of teams allowed more passing yards last season. Safety Daytione Smith and cornerback Josh Pierre-Louis are the main holdovers from a group that routinely allowed explosive plays. The Herd took swings on a slew of transfers, including Charles McCartherens and Eddie Pleasant III from Buffalo. With Boogie Trotter (five interceptions) gone, more playmakers will have to step up on that side of the ball.

SPECIALISTS Transfer Jorge Diaz Nicolas (Virginia) has big shoes to fill after All-MAC placekicker Lorcan Quinn transferred to Alabama. Nicholas has yet to attempt a kick in college, and punter Cooper Heimbach is a true freshman. Cornerback Brayden Hall, a transfer from FCS Central Connecticut State, could handle punt return duties. Kickoff returner Xayvion Turner-Bradshaw is the only established starter of the group.

FINAL ANALYSIS Marshall was in the mix for a bowl game until the season finale despite incredibly difficult circumstances. Now, Gibson has a sturdier foundation to build from and a talented quarterback in Del Rio-Wilson. Taking the next step as a team starts on defense, and that hinges on how well the transfers perform.

2025 RESULTS (5-7, 3-5 SBC)

Aug. 30	at Georgia	L	7-45
Sept. 6	Missouri State	L	20-21
Sept. 13	Eastern Kentucky	W	38-7
Sept. 20	at Middle Tennessee	W	42-28
Sept. 27	at Louisiana (ot)	L	51-54
Oct. 11	Old Dominion	W	48-24
Oct. 18	Texas State (ot)	W	40-37
Oct. 30	at Coastal Carolina	L	27-44
Nov. 8	James Madison	L	23-35
Nov. 15	at Georgia State	W	30-18
Nov. 22	at Appalachian State	L	24-26
Nov. 29	Georgia Southern	L	19-24

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	at Penn State
Sept. 12	Middle Tennessee
Sept. 19	at Missouri State
Sept. 26	Gardner-Webb
Oct. 3	at James Madison
Oct. 10	Coastal Carolina
Oct. 20	South Alabama
Oct. 31	at Old Dominion
Nov. 7	at Georgia Southern
Nov. 14	Appalachian State
Nov. 21	Georgia State
Nov. 28	at ULM

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Justyn Lyles, OT	★★★
2.	JT Fagan, OT	★★★
3.	Jae'Von White, OT	★★★
4.	Brennan Chambers, WR	★★★
5.	Caden Turner, EDGE	★★★
6.	Jaquez Keyes	★★★
7.	Andre Parker, LB	★★★
8.	Tristan Lester, S	★★★
9.	Jaycee Houston, S	★★★
10.	Zeke Gunn, S	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Tony Gibson • Record at School: 5-7 (1 year) • Career Record: 5-7 (1 year) • Offensive Coordinator: Rod Smith
Defensive Coordinator: Brad Lambert • Location: Huntington, W.Va. • Stadium: Joan C. Edwards Stadium (30,475)

OLD DOMINION MONARCHS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 94 | SUN BELT EAST PREDICTION: 2 | 2025 RECORD: 10-3, 6-2 SBC

OFFENSE The Monarchs matched their best season in program history in 2025. But the core of that roster — on offense, at least — scattered when the portal opened. Quarterback Colton Joseph, the Sun Belt Offensive Player of the Year, was the most high-profile departure.

The Cure Bowl against South Florida provided a glimpse of what the 2026 team might look like. Head coach Ricky Rahne's teams run the ball at an above-average rate, and that held true in quarterback Quinn Henicle's second career start. He and running back Devin Roche each finished with 100-plus rushing yards in the win over the Bulls. Though ODU added a signal-caller with starting experience in Jaxon Potter (Washington State transfer), it looks like Henicle's job to lose.

Henicle takes the reins of an offense that's breaking in five new starters along the line and trotting out a revamped receiver room. Rahne succeeded in finding diamonds in the rough at receiver last offseason, and he's trying again with transfers JJ Harrell from Holmes (Miss.) Community College and Zion Agnew from Div. II Lenoir-Rhyne.

DEFENSE ODU's defense was lights-out last season. The Monarchs held eight opponents to 10 points or fewer and allowed only 57 points across a six-game winning streak to end the year. With starters back at every level of the defense, that unit should again be among the Sun Belt's best.

Safety and top tackler Mario Easterly returns along with run-stuffing defensive lineman Chris Forbes, both of whom earned All-Sun Belt honors in 2025. Linebacker saw several departures, so the Monarchs brought in transfer Montrell Chapman (Mississippi State) to man the middle.

Few teams created havoc at the rate ODU did in 2025, but some of the most productive players from a unit that finished in the top 10 nationally in sacks and turnovers are no longer there.

SPECIALISTS Nathanial Eichner took over kicking duties in November and went 7-for-10 on field goals and 19-for-19 on extra points the rest of the way. ODU brought in transfer Andrew Nelms from FAU to compete. Ian Brandt is back at punter, though his average of just under 41 yards was on the low end in the Sun Belt. Roche led the conference in punt return average last season, and he's expanding his duties to kickoff returns, too.

FINAL ANALYSIS Rahne and the Monarchs desperately needed to put it all together in 2025, and they delivered with a historic campaign. ODU would be hard-pressed to repeat that success considering what it lost. Still, the defense provides a high floor, and Henicle could be a reasonable facsimile of Joseph under center. If that's the case, the Monarchs should be bowling — at a minimum — for the second season in a row.

2025 RESULTS (10-3, 6-2 SBC)

Aug. 30	at Indiana	L	14-27
Sept. 6	NC Central	W	54-6
Sept. 13	at Virginia Tech	W	45-26
Sept. 27	Liberty	W	21-7
Oct. 4	Coastal Carolina	W	47-7
Oct. 11	at Marshall	L	24-48
Oct. 18	at James Madison	L	27-63
Oct. 25	Appalachian State	W	24-21
Nov. 1	at ULM	W	31-6
Nov. 13	Troy	W	33-0
Nov. 22	at Georgia Southern	W	45-10
Nov. 29	Georgia State	W	27-10
Dec. 17	vs. South Florida #	W	24-10

#Cure Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	Norfolk State
Sept. 12	at Virginia Tech
Sept. 19	East Carolina
Sept. 26	James Madison
Oct. 3	at Georgia State
Oct. 10	at Appalachian State
Oct. 15	Georgia Southern
Oct. 24	at Louisiana Tech
Oct. 31	Marshall
Nov. 7	at Coastal Carolina
Nov. 21	at UConn
Nov. 28	Southern Miss

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Zialis Blackmon, ATH	★★★
2.	Malachi Harris, DL	★★★
3.	Shaq Leaks, S	★★★
4.	TaySean Jones, WR	★★★
5.	Brayden Myovela, WR	★★★
6.	BJ Bedgood, WR	★★★
7.	Brooklyn Nace, QB	★★★
8.	CJ Jackson III, RB	★★★
9.	Jeremiah Deese, S	★★★
10.	Landon Kehoe, LB	★★★

*Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Ricky Rahne • Record at School: 30-33 (5 years)
Career Record: 30-33 (5 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Kody Cook
Defensive Coordinator: Blake Seiler • Location: Norfolk, Va.
Stadium: S.B. Ballard Stadium (21,944)

DEVIN ROCHE

SCOUTING THE MONARCHS

"I hope they've got a regression coming because they were good these last couple years. That quarterback that they lost to Wisconsin [Colton Joseph] was the real deal. Him being gone is the biggest thing. He was that good of a player. ... Their corner, Brandon Crutchfield, and the safety, Lucas Struck, those guys really flashed on tape, and they're back. I remember thinking that when it was time to vote on all-conference. They also signed a linebacker, Montrell Chapman, that they got from Mississippi State. I thought he was a really good player when he was coming out of juco, and when he got in the portal this time, we had already recruited a linebacker, but he would've been a guy that we went after for sure."

— An opposing Sun Belt assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (1)

WR	1	JJ Harrell* (So.)	0	Zion Agnew* (Jr.)
WR	17	Sidney Mbanasor (Sr.)	11	TJ Johnson (Sr.)
WR	7	Kendall Harris* (Jr.)	8	Josh Rodriguez (Fr.)
LT	79	Raykwon Goldthwaite* (Sr.)	68	Martez Curry* (Sr.)
LG	70	Khi'Len Gates* (Jr.)	71	Jack Sheehan (Fr.)
C	50	Brayden Walker* (So.)	66	Mason Thrush* (Jr.)
RG	69	Logan Cox (Jr.)	60	Braden Ellis (Fr.)
RT	75	Demorrsion Brown* (So.)	74	Carson Bradley (Jr.)
TE	86	Leon Haughton Jr.* (Sr.)	80	Chris Warren (Fr.)
QB	10	Quinn Henicle (So.)	2	Jaxon Potter* (Jr.)
RB	**3**	**DEVIN ROCHE (JR.)**	5	Maurki James (So.)

DEFENSE (5)

DE	36	Javen Gibson (Sr.)	40	Hunter Malecki (So.)
DT	**9**	**DEANDRE LYNCH (JR.)**	44	Bucci Farmer* (So.)
DE	**90**	**CHRIS FORBES (SO.)**	95	Ahmaad Foster (So.)
LB	**10**	**KOA NAOTALA (SR.)**	13	Jed Olotu-Judah (So.)
MLB	6	Montrell Chapman* (Sr.)	0	Mario Thompson (Jr.)
LB	18	Jackson Forrest (So.)	24	Dirrick Goodman (Jr.)
CB	**1**	**ZION FRINK (JR.)**	23	Jorian Hayes (Jr.)
CB	5	Brandon Crutchfield (Jr.)	8	Greg Johnson* (Jr.)
NB	33	Daevon Iles (Jr.)	26	Justin Watts (So.)
S	**3**	**MARIO EASTERLY (SR.)**	20	Jivan Baly* (So.)
S	19	Lucas Struck (Jr.)	7	Ryan Ramey (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	93	Nathanial Eichner (Sr.)	KR	3	Devin Roche (Jr.)
P	96	Ian Brandt (Jr.)	PR	3	Devin Roche (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

BRIAN BISHOP-IMAGN IMAGES

CHAUNCY COBB

NELSON CHENAULT-IMAGN IMAGES

SCOUTING THE RED WOLVES

"I thought [former quarterback] Jaylen Raynor was really, really good. Thank God that dude isn't in the league anymore. At quarterback, [Texas quarterback transfer] Trey Owens is a really good player that we liked a lot out of high school. I wouldn't be surprised if he factored into that. ... [Running back] Kenyon Clay is back for them, and I thought he was really good last year. They've got a couple of their top receivers back, but I know they lost their best defensive player, Cody Sigler, to Auburn. He was a bada—. And the edge rusher that they got from NC Central, Donquarius Parker, he's gonna be a really good player. I think he can be an all-conference player."

— An opposing Sun Belt assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (7)				
WR	3	**HUNTER SUMMERS (JR.)**	18	Romel Stevens (Fr.)
WR	2	**CHAUNCY COBB (JR.)**	13	Boski Barrett* (So.)
WR	10	Jaylen Bonelli (Sr.)	0	Nana Burris (Sr.)
LT	71	Tanner Welch* (Jr.)	70	Manasse Itete* (So.)
LG	68	**TRISTIAN SMITH (SR.)**	77	Gabe Fortson (Jr.)
C	52	**MASON MYERS (JR.)**	53	Talan Chandler* (So.)
RG	50	**WIL SAXTON (SR.)**	74	Landry Cannon* (Jr.)
RT	72	Sterling Wiggins* (Jr.)	55	**ALERIC WATSON (SR.)**
TE	11	Tyler Little (Jr.)	19	Jaden Hamm* (Jr.)
QB	9	Trey Owens* (So.)	6	Ethan Crawford (Jr.)
RB	4	**DEVIN SPENCER (JR.)**	5	Kenyon Clay (Sr.)
DEFENSE (3)				
DE	11	Sultan Badmus* (Jr.)	27	AJ Thomas* (Jr.)
DT	95	Ryan Reese (So.)	44	Sam Hultz* (Sr.)
DT	92	Elias Sherman* (Jr.)	91	Tyeland Coleman* (Jr.)
DE	10	Tony Carter (So.)	14	Donquarius Parker* (Sr.)
LB	16	Joe Drew (So.)	23	Tre Stevens* (Jr.)
LB	22	Nigel Nelson (So.)	9	Kam Moore* (Sr.)
CB	3	Noah Flores* (Jr.)	1	Braden Jackson (Jr.)
CB	0	Dontrae Henderson* (So.)	13	Kyle Williams (So.)
S	6	**AG MCGHEE (SR.)**	4	Makai Shahid* (Jr.)
S	5	Five Hamilton* (Jr.)	15	**BRANDON GREIL (SR.)**
S	8	**BRANDON BARNES (JR.)**	21	Malik McConico (Sr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	34	Clune Van Andel (Sr.)	KR	2 Chauncy Cobb (Jr.)
P	90	Daniel Vuckovic* (Jr.)	PR	10 Jaylen Bonelli (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

ARKANSAS STATE RED WOLVES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 100 | SUN BELT WEST PREDICTION: 2 | 2025 RECORD: 7-6, 5-3 SBC

OFFENSE Head coach Butch Jones opted for a new look, hiring Garrett Altman, formerly Vanderbilt's quarterbacks coach, as offensive coordinator. While the tempo is likely to be a little more deliberate, the outcome of a four-man quarterback competition will also determine the approach. Texas transfer Trey Owens is more suited to the pocket at 6-foot-5; Ethan Crawford is a breakaway running threat; and Vanderbilt transfers Drew Dickey and Jérémy St-Hilaire offer a mix of skills.

Running backs Devin Spencer and Kenyon Clay combined for 1,082 rushing yards last year and should find more room behind a transfer-bolstered line. Chauncy Cobb, the Red Wolves' 5-foot-6 slot receiver, caught 73 passes in 2025, while Hunter Summers, a taller target at 6-foot-3, had 44 receptions.

DEFENSE The Red Wolves must rebuild their front after recording 39 sacks last season, tying for the most in the Sun Belt. Six tackles and five ends on the spring roster were first-year transfers. Sophomore Ryan Reese, the only returning defensive tackle, emerged as part of the rotation last season.

Joe Drew, who started the last five games last year as a freshman, switches from nickel safety to linebacker to play alongside Nigel Nelson, who also played heavily as a freshman and finished with 54 tackles. Safety AG McGhee is the top returning tackler (83 total tackles in 2025). Brandon Greil and Brandon Barnes were starters in last year's secondary, and Kennesaw State transfer Five Hamilton is in line for a key role. Arkansas State struggled against the pass in 2025, allowing 245 yards per game.

SPECIALISTS Arkansas State has a trusted kicker in Clune Van Andel, who made a game-winning field goal vs. South Alabama and was 21-of-27 on the year. Cobb, who returned kickoffs for touchdowns against Arkansas and Louisiana, was first-team All-Sun Belt as a return specialist after averaging 26.9 yards per return. Fellow wideout Jaylen Bonelli takes over on punt returns after breaking a 35-yarder in the Xbox Bowl. Daniel Vuckovic, who averaged 42.3 yards per punt last year at Northern Illinois, was the only punter on the spring roster.

FINAL ANALYSIS After losing four of its first five games in 2025, Arkansas State took six of its last eight to finish 7-6 with a victory over Missouri State in the Xbox Bowl. While the Red Wolves have a more manageable schedule with one Power 4 opponent instead of two, they can no longer lean on the two-minute mastery of former quarterback Jaylen Raynor, who engineered six game-winning drives in the past two seasons. Arkansas State's hopes of playing in a fourth consecutive bowl game likely depend on finding a capable successor to Raynor and rebuilding its defensive line.

2025 RESULTS (7-6, 5-3 SBC)

Aug. 30	SE Missouri State	W	42-24
Sept. 6	vs. Arkansas #	L	14-56
Sept. 13	Iowa State	L	16-24
Sept. 20	at Kennesaw State	L	21-28
Sept. 27	at ULM	L	16-28
Oct. 4	Texas State	W	31-30
Oct. 14	at South Alabama	W	15-14
Oct. 25	Georgia Southern	W	34-24
Nov. 1	at Troy	W	23-10
Nov. 8	Southern Miss	L	21-27
Nov. 20	Louisiana	L	30-34
Nov. 29	at Appalachian State	W	30-29
Dec. 18	vs. Missouri State %	W	34-28

#Little Rock, AR %Xbox Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	at Memphis
Sept. 12	West Georgia
Sept. 19	at TCU
Sept. 26	Kennesaw State
Oct. 3	at Louisiana
Oct. 8	South Alabama
Oct. 17	at Southern Miss
Oct. 24	Georgia State
Nov. 7	ULM
Nov. 14	at Coastal Carolina
Nov. 21	at Louisiana Tech
Nov. 28	Troy

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Tavon Bell, DL	★★★
2.	Ezell Jolly, RB	★★★
3.	KeAndre Gibson, CB	★★★
4.	Brandon Goliday, WR	★★★
5.	Paul Risper, CB	★★★
6.	Kena Rego, WR	★★★
7.	Josh Austin, OT	★★★
8.	Dallas Boozer, WR	★★★
9.	Tanner Welch, IOL	★★★
10.	TJ Spann, DL	★★★

*Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Butch Jones • Record at School: 26-37 (5 years)
Career Record: 110-91 (15+ years) • Offensive Coordinator: Garrett Altman
Defensive Coordinator: Griff McCarley • Location: Jonesboro, Ark.
Stadium: Centennial Bank Stadium (30,406)

LOUISIANA RAGIN' CAJUNS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 114 | SUN BELT WEST PREDICTION: 4 | 2025 RECORD: 6-7, 5-3 SBC

OFFENSE Quarterback Lunch Winfield came off the bench in late September to lead a wild, come-from-behind win over Marshall and went on to take every snap from that point. A dual-threat type, Winfield typically did more damage with his legs than his arm, but he still has plenty of room to grow as a passer entering his first full year atop the depth chart.

When Lunch isn't calling his own number, carries will be up for grabs following the transfers of running backs Zylan Perry (Cincinnati) and Bill Davis (Virginia Tech), a workmanlike combo who accounted for 3,264 yards and 28 touchdowns over the past two years. The only remotely proven playmaker still in the fold is junior wideout Shelton Sampson Jr., a former LSU signee on breakout watch after emerging as the Cajuns' top receiver in his first year in Lafayette.

Up front, the O-line projects as a strength after an injury-plagued campaign that featured eight different starting combinations. Seven of the 10 linemen who served in that shuffle are back.

DEFENSE Nine of last year's top 10 defenders in terms of snap counts are gone. The one holdover in that group, sophomore cornerback Brent Gordon Jr., looks like a rising star after breaking up 11 passes as a true freshman. The rest of the depth chart is murkier.

There are familiar faces along the front line, where veterans Fitzgerald West Jr., Chase Edwards, Ashley Williams, Lance Williams and Maxie Baudoin IV were all part of the regular rotation. Ditto for safeties Maurion Eleam and Kody Jackson. Linebacker, however, could be in for a full reset. The top three candidates in the spring — Micah Johnson, Conor McPherson and Ethan Veal — are all in their third or fourth year in the program but have played almost exclusively on special teams to date.

SPECIALISTS Kicker Tony Sterner finished 20-of-28 on field-goal attempts in 2025, including 3-of-6 from beyond 50 yards. The new punter, Mason Golding, is the latest in a long line of Aussies to man the position. Ja'Corian Norris took over kick return duties late last year and isn't likely to give them up anytime soon after housing the opening kickoff against rival ULM.

FINAL ANALYSIS Head coach Michael Desormeaux is a south Louisiana lifer running a homegrown program: Only 15 players on the spring roster arrived as transfers, among the fewest in the country. A 10-4 finish in 2024 stands as proof that it's still possible to build a winner the (more or less) old-fashioned way. The baseline, however, has been set by 6-7 records in each of Desormeaux's other three seasons. The challenge in Year 5 is bucking the trend before it becomes the new normal.

LUNCH WINFIELD

SCOUTING THE RAGIN' CAJUNS

"I know they returned some of their top players with eligibility left. Pretty good retention for a Group of 6 team. Their quarterback, Lunch Winfield, is back after he took the job about halfway through the year. They started 2-6 and then won four straight to go bowling, and a lot of that was because of him. Really good runner. Their two O-linemen, Kaden Moreau and Cooper Fordham, are really good players on the inside. The leading receiver, Shelton Sampson Jr., who was a 5-star out of LSU, is back. And then another former LSU transfer, defensive tackle Fitzgerald West Jr., got in the portal and then pulled his name out, so I know they're excited about that."

— An opposing Sun Belt assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

		OFFENSE (8)		
WR	6	**SHELTON SAMPSON JR. (JR.)**	9	KeDarius Wade (Jr.)
WR	17	Landon Strother (So.)	85	Landon Baptiste (Jr.)
WR	8	Jaydon Johnson (Sr.)	2	Rahji Dennis (So.)
LT	57	Zay Alexander (So.)	55	Baylynn Williams (Fr.)
LG	75	**KADEN MOREAU (SR.)**	61	Jayce Mitchell* (So.)
C	50	**COOPER FORDHAM (JR.)**	77	Jakoby Isom (So.)
RG	76	**MATTHEW BROUSSARD (JR.)**	59	Andrew Martinez (Jr.)
RT	71	**GEORGE JACKSON (SR.)**	52	Ryder Bentley (So.)
TE	88	**CADEN JENSEN (JR.)**	83	**BROCK CHAPPELL (SR.)**
QB	7	**LUNCH WINFIELD (JR.)**	11	Daniel Beale (So.)
RB	22	Anthony Reagan Jr.* (Jr.)	24	Steven Blanco (So.)
		DEFENSE (2)		
DE	17	Tito Chikere* (Sr.)	9	Lance Williams (Jr.)
NT	68	**FITZGERALD WEST JR. (SR.)**	99	Ashton Wright (So.)
DT	41	Chase Edwards (Jr.)	95	Maxie Baudoin IV (Sr.)
ILB	6	Conor McPherson (So.)	44	Jake St. Andre (Sr.)
ILB	3	Micah Johnson (Jr.)	7	Ethan Veal (So.)
OLB	2	Ashley Williams (Jr.)	15	Na'Tori Brown (So.)
CB	11	**BRENT GORDON JR. (SO.)**	13	Curley Reed III (Jr.)
CB	10	Avery Demery (So.)	23	Jeremiah Moses (Jr.)
NB	21	Maurion Eleam (Sr.)	25	Jayden Gloston (Fr.)
SS	35	Collin Jacob (Sr.)	24	Lake Bates (So.)
FS	8	Kody Jackson (Jr.)	28	Steven Ranel II (Fr.)
		SPECIALISTS		
K	95	Tony Sterner (Sr.)	KR 15	Ja'Corian Norris (So.)
P	49	Mason Golding (Fr.)	PR 17	Landon Strother (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** · *2026 TRANSFER

2025 RESULTS (6-7, 5-3 SBC)

Aug. 30	Rice	L	12-14
Sept. 6	McNeese	W	34-10
Sept. 13	at Missouri	L	10-52
Sept. 20	at Eastern Michigan	L	31-34
Sept. 27	Marshall (ot)	W	54-51
Oct. 11	at James Madison	L	14-24
Oct. 18	Southern Miss	L	10-22
Oct. 25	at Troy	L	23-35
Nov. 1	at South Alabama	W	31-22
Nov. 8	Texas State	W	42-39
Nov. 20	at Arkansas State	W	34-30
Nov. 29	ULM (ot)	W	30-27
Dec. 17	vs. Delaware #	L	13-20

#68 Ventures Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	Lamar
Sept. 12	at USC
Sept. 19	UAB
Sept. 26	at Charlotte
Oct. 3	Arkansas State
Oct. 10	at Louisiana Tech
Oct. 17	Troy
Oct. 24	at Southern Miss
Nov. 7	South Alabama
Nov. 12	at ULM
Nov. 21	Coastal Carolina
Nov. 28	at Georgia State

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Jerry Birdlow, TE	★★★
2.	Luke Green, CB	★★★
3.	Julius Harper, CB	★★★
4.	Edrick Williams, CB	★★★
5.	Jayden Reed, S	★★★
6.	Gunnar Goodwin, IOL	★★★
7.	Patrick Gosslee, LB	★★★
8.	Michael Bowens Jr., OT	★★★
9.	Jai'Vale Fredericks, OT	★★★
10.	Devin Franklin, EDGE	★★★

**Per Rivals*

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Michael Desormeaux · Record at School: 29-25 (4+ years)
Career Record: 29-25 (4+ years) · Offensive Coordinator: Tim Leger
Defensive Coordinator: Jim Salgado · Location: Lafayette, La.
Stadium: Cajun Field (30,000)

SCOTT CLAUSE / USATODAY NETWORK

JADON MAYFIELD

SCOUTING THE BULLDOGS

"Their top two quarterbacks are back, but Blake Baker is the better passer. Trey Kukuk is a good athlete, gives them some versatility. Kind of a Taysom Hill-type guy. Their leading receiver [tight end Eli Finley], he's a really good player. We were hoping he was gonna get in the portal, but he didn't. Kam Franklin is a safety that I've always liked. And then the DB that they took from Arkansas, Ahkhari Johnson, I think he's gonna be a good addition for them. ... Only bringing in 12 portal guys is crazy, but it all goes back to three or four years ago when [head coach] Sonny Cumbie first got there. They took so many high school guys year in, year out that they've been able to develop and move kids through the program."

— An opposing CUSA assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)				
WR	86	Talyn Shettron* (Sr.)	11	Jalen Mickens (So.)
WR	47	Jay Wilkerson (Sr.)	83	Luke Watkins (So.)
WR	6	Marcus Calwise Jr.* (Jr.)	15	David Pierro (Sr.)
LT	**72**	**HAYDEN CHRISTMAN (JR.)**	76	Cyler Corn (So.)
LG	**79**	**ASHANTI COLE (SR.)**	74	Jamon Lee Jr.* (Jr.)
C	60	Roy Brackins III (Jr.)	56	Andrew Richard (So.)
RG	53	Austin Ellis (So.)	66	Will Hutchens (Jr.)
RT	52	Troy Smith III (Jr.)	58	Tye Hylton* (So.)
TE	**84**	**ELI FINLEY (SR.)**	87	Brayden Bockler (Jr.)
QB	**5**	**BLAKE BAKER (JR.)**	2	Trey Kukuk (Sr.)
RB	23	Jaden Miller* (Jr.)	26	Dylone Brooks (Fr.)
DEFENSE (3)				
DL	**11**	**EMMANUEL OGUNS (SR.)**	48	Kaden McIver* (Jr.)
NT	97	Justice Williams* (Sr.)	93	Jacob Bradford (So.)
DL	98	Donovan Rieman (Sr.)	99	Judd Rouyea (Jr.)
LB	21	Zheric Hill (So.)	35	Cole Watson (Fr.)
LB	**10**	**KOLBE FIELDS (SR.)**	23	Alonzo Jackson Jr. (So.)
LB	**22**	**JADON MAYFIELD (SO.)**	33	Jaylon Parnell (Fr.)
CB	2	Amari Butler (Sr.)	17	Demario Bookhart* (So.)
CB	3	Kameron Carter (Sr.)	7	Janard Lockhardt* (Jr.)
NB	0	Jordan McRae (Jr.)	5	Ahkhari Johnson* (Jr.)
SS	4	Kam Franklin (Jr.)	20	Ty Jones* (Sr.)
FS	1	Sam Fongang (Sr.)	13	MJ Moultrie II* (Jr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	38	Kaegan Kent (Fr.)	KR 24	Kenny Thomas (Fr.)
P	30	Reuben Edwards* (Fr.)	PR 6	Marcus Calwise Jr.* (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

PAUL KARGE/THE SHREVEPORT TIMES

LOUISIANA TECH BULLDOGS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 104 | SUN BELT WEST PREDICTION: 3 | 2025 RECORD: 8-5, 5-3 CUSA

OFFENSE Three different quarterbacks saw significant reps in 2025, the majority going to sophomore Blake Baker before a torn ACL ended his season in November. Junior-college transfer Trey Kukuk presided over a three-game winning streak to close the season. Baker went through non-contact drills in the spring, but regardless of the pecking order, there will be a role for Kukuk, who adds a dynamic element as a runner.

Last year's top three running backs all moved on, leaving the position without a player who has played a snap at the NCAA level. The top four wideouts are gone, too, although senior tight end Eli Finley is a proven target underneath. The revamped receiving corps includes 2025 injury casualty Jay Wilkerson; FCS Eastern Kentucky transfer Marcus Calwise Jr.; and Oklahoma State transfer Talyn Shettron, a once-touted recruit.

Up front, left tackle Hayden Christman has logged 24 consecutive starts for an offensive line that allowed the fewest sacks in Conference USA last season.

DEFENSE The Bulldogs feasted on takeaways in 2025, tying for second nationally with 22 interceptions. The bad news: The majority of those picks left with safeties Jakari Foster (NFL), Jacob Fields (TCU) and Michael Richard (Michigan State). The entire starting five in the secondary will be new, with last year's backups vying for reps with an influx of transfers.

There are few concerns at linebacker, where sixth-year vet Kolbe Fields headlines a deep unit. Fields, who came to Ruston from previous stops at South Carolina and LSU, was on his way to living up to his billing as the preseason CUSA Defensive Player of the Year last fall before a leg injury cut his season short. His absence left plenty of reps for freshmen Jadon Mayfield, Alonzo Jackson Jr. and Zheric Hill, who might be difficult to keep off the field as sophomores.

SPECIALISTS Placekickers Drew Henderson and John Hoyet Chance finished just 10-of-18 on field-goal attempts in 2025. Their struggles opened the door late in the year for true freshman Kaegan Kent, who will now compete with Henderson. The new punter, freshman Reuben Edwards, arrived in the spring from Australia. There is no experience in the return game, which means opportunities are there for the taking.

FINAL ANALYSIS After months of uncertainty and legal posturing, Conference USA agreed to a deal in April allowing Louisiana Tech to depart for the Sun Belt for the 2026 season. Thus ends a 13-year run in CUSA that yielded mostly winning conference records but no titles. The move offers the Bulldogs a fresh start in a more competitive league, but matching last season's 8-5 record in their Sun Belt debut figures to be an uphill battle.

2025 RESULTS (8-5, 5-3 CUSA)

Aug. 30	SE Louisiana	W	24-0
Sept. 6	at LSU	L	7-23
Sept. 13	New Mexico State	W	49-14
Sept. 20	Southern Miss	W	30-20
Sept. 27	at UTEP	W	30-11
Oct. 9	at Kennesaw State	L	7-35
Oct. 21	WKU (ot)	L	27-28
Oct. 31	Sam Houston	W	55-14
Nov. 8	at Delaware	L	24-25
Nov. 15	at Washington State	L	3-28
Nov. 22	Liberty (ot)	W	34-28
Nov. 29	at Missouri State	W	42-30
Dec. 30	vs. Coastal Carolina #	W	23-14

#Independence Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	Northwestern State
Sept. 12	at LSU
Sept. 19	at Baylor
Oct. 3	Army
Oct. 10	Louisiana
Oct. 17	at ULM
Oct. 24	Old Dominion
Oct. 31	at South Alabama
Nov. 7	at Troy
Nov. 14	Southern Miss
Nov. 21	Arkansas State
Nov. 28	at Georgia Southern

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Kenny Thomas, RB	★★★
2.	Nathan Green, S	★★★
3.	Rayshun Hurt, RB	★★★
4.	Demarcus Belton, RB	★★★
5.	AJ Tarvin, CB	★★★
6.	Jeremiah Smith, LB	★★★
7.	Damien Richard II, CB	★★★
8.	Carter Harris, WR	★★★
9.	Emanual Collins, S	★★★
10.	Grayson Hardy, S	★★★

*Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Sonny Cumbie • Record at School: 19-31 (4 years)
Career Record: 21-34 (4+ years) • Offensive Coordinator: Nathan Young
Defensive Coordinator: Luke Olson • Location: Ruston, La.
Stadium: Joe Aillet Stadium (28,562)

SOUTH ALABAMA JAGUARS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 115 | SUN BELT WEST PREDICTION: 5 | 2025 RECORD: 4-8, 3-5 SBC

OFFENSE South Alabama's offense took a step back in head coach Major Applewhite's second season at the helm, but the Jaguars will have some vital experience returning.

Quarterback Bishop Davenport (2,072 yards, 12 TDs, six INTs) started all 12 games and finished second in the Sun Belt in completion percentage (68%). Running back Keenan Phillips is USA's leading returning rusher with 607 yards after the departure of All-Sun Belt first-teamer Kentrel Bullock. PJ Martin (326 yards, two TDs) will share the load.

Leading wide receiver Devin Voisin is gone after seven seasons, and Jeremy Scott transferred to TCU, leaving Anthony Eager and Brendan Jenkins as the only two proven pass-catchers. The offensive line returns one starter and welcomes some experienced transfer portal additions.

DEFENSE South Alabama lost a plethora of players from its defensive front to the portal, leaving first-year defensive coordinator Todd Orlando with a rebuild on his hands.

Emmanuel Waller and Stephen Johnson return after being rotational pieces up front last year, while five defensive linemen transferred in, including Mase Lewis (FCS McNeese) and Dylan Chiedo (FCS Furman).

The linebacking corps has to replace some key players, but Tirrell Johnson (54 tackles, a sack, an INT) is back after ranking fifth on the team in tackles, and Caleb Dozier returns from injury.

The secondary lost All-Sun Belt corner Nehemiah Chandler to Florida State. Jayvon Henderson (14 tackles, five PBUs) returns to the other corner spot after playing well opposite Chandler in his first season.

There is a lot of lost production at safety, but Cole Blaylock and Dallas Young saw snaps in all 12 games and will compete for starting jobs.

SPECIALISTS Davis Little appeared in five games at placekicker, mainly playing behind Hamilton DiBoyan. With DiBoyan gone, Little will compete for the full-time job. Aleksi Pulkkinen averaged 40.4 yards per punt and landed nine of them inside the 20. Phillips will likely take the kick return job after returning three kicks last season.

FINAL ANALYSIS It's an important Year 3 for Applewhite, who went 4-8 last season after leading South Alabama to a 7-6 finish and bowl win in his first year. Count on the offense to improve. Davenport has the potential to get back to where he was two years ago, and there might be just enough experience back to comprise a good supporting cast. Staff overhauls on defense, coupled with several new players at all three levels, leave a lot more questions than answers, particularly on the defensive line and in the secondary.

BISHOP DAVENPORT

SCOUTING THE JAGUARS

"They flipped most of their roster, but their quarterback [Bishop Davenport] is back, and I thought he was a good player who fit their scheme. It's unfair that he gets compared to [former South Alabama quarterback] Gio Lopez because he's kind of a similar player. ... I thought the running back that they lost, Kentrel Bullock, was a really good player, but their No. 2 back is back, and they've got some receivers that are really good. Micah Woods, they kind of used him as a gadget guy last year with jet sweeps, and he was their return man. I think he can be a good every-down receiver. Another year in that system might help him. And [wide receiver] Brendan Jenkins only played in a few games last year, but I think he can have a big year for them."

— An opposing Sun Belt assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (2)				
WR	11	Anthony Eager (Jr.)	10	Noah Toster (Jr.)
WR	6	Micah Woods (Sr.)	13	Jeremiah Jones-Thomas (So.)
WR	12	Brendan Jenkins (Sr.)	83	Jerrian Graham (So.)
LT	55	Khayree Lee Jr.* (So.)	68	Reese Osei-Wusu (Jr.)
LG	69	Kenton Jerido (Sr.)	66	Devin White (Fr.)
C	60	Devon Waller* (Jr.)	78	Aydan Newell (Fr.)
RG	57	Shalik Hubbard* (Sr.)	76	Logan Joellenbeck (So.)
RT	**72**	**ETHAN HUBBARD (JR.)**	77	Kearius Bivens (Fr.)
TE	19	Rod Gibbs (Sr.)	82	Everett Hunter* (Sr.)
QB	**4**	**BISHOP DAVENPORT (SR.)**	7	Jared Hollins So.)
RB	21	Keenan Phillips (Jr.)	0	PJ Martin (Jr.)
DEFENSE (3)				
DE	88	Mase Lewis* (Sr.)	41	Tyler Carter (So.)
NT	97	Stephen Johnson (Jr.)	98	Tre Brown (Jr.)
DT	**9**	**EMMANUEL WALLER (SR.)**	51	Jordan May (Jr.)
EDGE	42	Dylan Chiedo* (Jr.)	90	E'Mauri Smiley (So.)
LB	**20**	**TIRRELL JOHNSON (SR.)**	26	Parker Shattuck (Jr.)
LB	16	Seidrion Langston* (Sr.)	22	Caleb Dozier (So.)
CB	**2**	**JAYVON HENDERSON (SR.)**	24	Damyrion Darby (Jr.)
CB	16	Jaylen Moson* (Jr.)	15	Tre Webb III* (Jr.)
NB	17	Dallas Young (Jr.)	34	Bradley Thomas (Sr.)
S	12	Anthony Brown (Sr.)	11	DJ Moore* (Sr.)
S	14	Cole Blaylock (Jr.)	4	Kohl Bradley (Fr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	35	Davis Little (So.)	KR	21 Keenan Phillips (Jr.)
P	40	Aleksi Pulkkinen (Sr.)	PR	6 Micah Woods (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

JAKE CRANDALL/ ADVERTISER

2025 RESULTS (4-8, 3-5 SBC)

Aug. 30	Morgan State	W	38-21
Sept. 6	Tulane	L	31-33
Sept. 13	at Auburn	L	15-31
Sept. 20	Coastal Carolina	L	20-38
Sept. 27	at North Texas	L	22-36
Oct. 4	at Troy (ot)	L	24-31
Oct. 14	Arkansas State	L	14-15
Oct. 23	at Georgia State	W	38-31
Nov. 1	Louisiana	L	22-31
Nov. 15	at ULM	W	26-14
Nov. 22	Southern Miss	W	42-35
Nov. 29	at Texas State	L	26-49

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	SE Louisiana
Sept. 12	at Tulane
Sept. 19	Ohio
Sept. 26	at Kentucky
Oct. 3	ULM
Oct. 8	at Arkansas State
Oct. 20	at Marshall
Oct. 31	Louisiana Tech
Nov. 7	at Louisiana
Nov. 14	Troy
Nov. 21	at Southern Miss
Nov. 28	Appalachian State

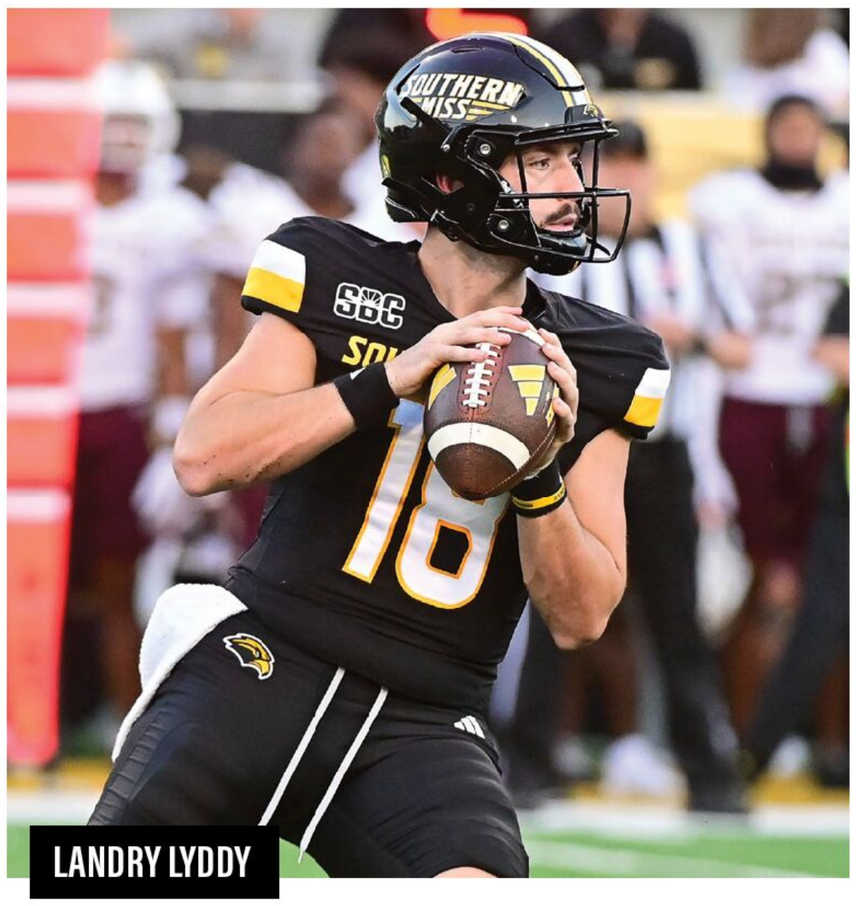
TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Antwon Thomas, EDGE	★★★★
2.	Tomareo Johnson Jr., S	★★★
3.	Lavonte Cole, RB	★★★
4.	Khatori Marion, WR	★★★
5.	Brody Jones, WR	★★★
6.	Dominic White, WR	★★★
7.	Julius Mathis, TE	★★★
8.	Teryn Green, S	★★★
9.	Zecharaiah Hall, LB	★★★
10.	Tre Webb III, CB	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Major Applewhite • Record at School: 11-14 (2 years) • Career Record: 26-25 (4+ years) • Offensive Coordinator: Major Applewhite • Defensive Coordinators: Todd Orland, Jason Washington • Location: Mobile, Ala. • Stadium: Hancock Whitney Stadium (25,450)



LANDRY LYDDY

SOUTHERN MISS GOLDEN EAGLES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 123 | SUN BELT WEST PREDICTION: 6 | 2025 RECORD: 7-6, 5-3 SBC

OFFENSE Southern Miss returns exactly one starter: seventh-year offensive lineman Broderick Roman, who took every meaningful snap at center in 2025 in his first year on campus. Otherwise, "we're starting from scratch on 99% of this roster," says new head coach Blake Anderson, whose promotion from offensive coordinator last December coincided with a mass exodus via graduation and the portal.

At quarterback, a pair of new arrivals — senior transfer Ethan Hampton and true freshman Hugh Price — split spring reps with last year's backups, Landry Lyddy and John White. If experience counts for anything, the edge goes to Hampton, a sixth-year vet with 14 FBS starts under his belt at Northern Illinois. But Hampton barely saw the field in 2025 at Illinois, and the 6-foot-5 Price is looming, literally and figuratively.

The biggest wild card among the new arrivals is Penn State transfer receiver Kaden Saunders, a former blue-chip recruit more than two years removed from his last live rep due to a nagging foot injury. At full speed, he could be the most dynamic presence in the Southern Miss attack.

DEFENSE The defense under first-year coordinator Joe Bolden will consist almost entirely of transfers, none of whom has logged more than 500 snaps at the FBS level. There is some untapped talent on hand, with once-touted prospects who began their careers at Auburn (DB Laquan Robinson), Ole Miss (DE Jeffery Rush), Ohio State (DB Jyaire Brown), TCU (CB Champ Lewis), Texas (CB Ishmael Ibraheem) and Texas A&M (DB Jordan Pride).

They'll be competing for reps with an influx from the FCS and junior-college ranks, among them 6-foot-6 edge rusher A'mari Wilson (Campbell), seasoned linebacker Andrew Martin (Stetson) and lanky cornerback Hiroshi Carr (Morgan State).

SPECIALISTS Placekickers Creighton Wilbanks and Reed Harradine return, but the pair was inconsistent, connecting on just 4-of-10 field-goal attempts from beyond 40 yards. The new punter, Dusty Zimmer, is a strapping Australian by way of Washington. FCS Chattanooga transfer A.J. Little is most likely to succeed in the return game after housing a pair of punt returns in 2025 for the Mocs.

FINAL ANALYSIS Few traces remain of last year's team, which ran out of gas in November after starting 5-0 in Sun Belt play. Anderson, who led his teams to nine bowl games in 10 seasons as head coach at Arkansas State (2014-20) and Utah State (2021-23), is no stranger to winning under less-than-ideal circumstances. But trotting out what amounts to a brand-new team in Year 1 is a new one even for him.

SCOUTING THE GOLDEN EAGLES

"You get a little bit of continuity with [new head coach] Blake Anderson having already been on staff. His reputation, and his familiarity with the conference. They're in a fertile recruiting footprint, so there won't be any challenges in terms of having talent. They were a game away from playing for a Sun Belt championship, and you can at least still use that momentum in the return and the respectability as a rallying cry going into this season. ... They basically flipped over a new roster. One guy that they brought in, [defensive lineman] Kameron Cyprien, he's a juco guy they got, and I think he's gonna be an all-conference player."

— An opposing Sun Belt assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (1)

WR	8	A.J. Little* (Jr.)	13	Grant Page (Sr.)
WR	11	Davis Dalton (Sr.)	23	Trey Horne (Jr.)
WR	7	Kaden Saunders* (Jr.)	1	Mario Sanders II* (Sr.)
LT	70	Braden Cain* (Jr.)	63	Da'Jay'Quwan Jackson-Payne* (Jr.)
LG	74	Luke Rogers (Jr.)	53	Toby Mealer* (Fr.)
C	**67**	**BRODERICK ROMAN (SR.)**	73	Hayden Breal (Fr.)
RG	77	Chase Malamala (So.)	75	Casey Jean-Baptiste* (Jr.)
RT	78	Christian Young* (Sr.)		Dante Devine* (Jr.)
TE	88	Javery Mayberry* (So.)	81	Preston Kilgore* (Jr.)
QB	14	Ethan Hampton* (Sr.)	18	Landry Lyddy (Sr.)
RB	2	Robert Briggs (Sr.)	26	Brandon Hood* (So.)

DEFENSE (0)

DE	11	A'mari Wilson* (Jr.)	41	Will Smith* (So.)
NT	52	Xavier McIver* (Sr.)	91	Jackson Banks* (Jr.)
DT	95	Josh Johnson* (Jr.)	55	Nasim Cairo* (Sr.)
DE	90	Jeffery Rush* (So.)	7	Kameron Cyprien* (Jr.)
LB	13	Mathis Haygood (Jr.)	45	Teyondre Coleman* (Jr.)
LB	6	Andrew Martin* (Sr.)	42	Melvin Spriggs* (Jr.)
CB	23	Hiroshi Carr* (Jr.)	8	Ishmael Ibraheem (Sr.)
CB	1	Champ Lewis* (Sr.)	27	Kelby Hampton* (So.)
NB	15	Jyaire Brown* (Sr.)	18	MaLik Caswell (So.)
SS	25	Landon Sylvie* (Jr.)	12	Laquan Robinson* (Sr.)
FS	26	Baron Taylor* (Jr.)	22	Kobi Albert* (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	40	Creighton Wilbanks (So.)	KR	8	A.J. Little* (Jr.)
P	36	Dusty Zimmer* (Fr.)	PR	8	A.J. Little* (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

MATT BUSH/SPECIAL TO THE CLARION

2025 RESULTS (7-6, 5-3 SBC)

Aug. 30	Mississippi State	L	17-34
Sept. 6	Jackson State	W	38-20
Sept. 13	Appalachian State	W	38-22
Sept. 20	at Louisiana Tech	L	20-30
Sept. 27	Jacksonville State	W	42-25
Oct. 9	at Georgia Southern	W	38-35
Oct. 18	at Louisiana	W	22-10
Oct. 25	ULM	W	49-21
Nov. 8	at Arkansas State	W	27-21
Nov. 15	Texas State	L	14-41
Nov. 22	at South Alabama	L	35-42
Nov. 29	Troy	L	18-28
Dec. 23	vs. WKU #	L	16-27

#New Orleans Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	Alcorn State
Sept. 12	at Auburn
Sept. 19	UConn
Sept. 26	at Tulane
Oct. 6	at Troy
Oct. 17	Arkansas State
Oct. 24	Louisiana
Oct. 31	at ULM
Nov. 5	James Madison
Nov. 14	at Louisiana Tech
Nov. 21	South Alabama
Nov. 28	at Old Dominion

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Chauncey Davis Jr., CB	★★★
2.	Caleb Triplett, LB	★★★
3.	David Aboya, WR	★★★
4.	Eelijah Singleton, WR	★★★
5.	Broderick Peters, TE	★★★
6.	Ari Slocum, IOL	★★★
7.	Hugh Price, QB	★★★
8.	Talik Parkman, DL	★★★
9.	Teyondre Coleman, LB	★★★
10.	Dante Devine, IOL	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Blake Anderson • Record at School: 0-1 (1 year)
Career Record: 0-1 (1 year) • Offensive Coordinator: Kyle Cefalo
Defensive Coordinator: Joe Bolden • Location: Hattiesburg, Miss.
Stadium: M.M. Roberts Stadium (36,000)

TROY TROJANS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 81 | SUN BELT WEST PREDICTION: 1 | 2025 RECORD: 8-6, 6-2 SBC

OFFENSE When he's healthy, sixth-year quarterback Will "Goose" Crowder is a steady hand with all-conference potential. The problem is keeping him upright: Crowder has missed 14 games over the past two seasons to assorted injuries. His understudy, fellow senior Tucker Kilcrease, took the majority of snaps in 2025 while presiding over a 5-2 record as a starter.

Troy needs more from the surrounding cast after finishing dead last in the Sun Belt in both total offense and yards per play. A new coordinator, Adam Austin, arrived in January from the highest-scoring team in the FCS, Tarleton State. So did an influx of skill talent from the junior-college ranks, headlined by junior-college All-America running back Gavin Griffin and former Ole Miss signee Noreel White, a wide receiver.

Up front, the Trojans welcome back left tackle Elijah Prather, whose sophomore campaign ended at midseason due to injury.

DEFENSE Nearly the entire starting lineup moved on, but there are familiar faces. Juco product Donnie Smith broke out in 2025, earning a first-team All-Sun Belt nod despite being limited to a part-time role in his first year on campus. In Year 2, Smith is entrenched at "Bandit," earning praise from head coach Gerad Parker in the spring for his emergence as a vocal leader. Former walk-on Justin Powe is entering his third year as a starter at safety. Seniors Kam Curry, Luke Hodge, TJ Thompson, Jordan Perry and Jabari Strait are all due for promotions to more prominent roles.

Newcomers include two SEC refugees via Arkansas (DE Kavion Henderson) and Tennessee (S Marcus Goree Jr.), both of whom will compete for reps, as well as a pair of injury-plagued transfers from Boston College, DT Ty Clemons and LB Bryce Steele, looking to go out on a high note.

SPECIALISTS Punter Evan Crenshaw earned Sun Belt Special Teams Player of the Year honors as a junior after dropping 29 punts inside opponents' 20-yard lines, most in the nation. Kicker is less settled, with four candidates who have yet to attempt a field goal at the D-I level. The competition at the return spots is similarly wide open.

FINAL ANALYSIS Parker's predecessor, Jon Sumrall, set a lofty bar by winning back-to-back conference titles in 2022 and '23. Nobody was about to confuse the 2025 Trojans with those teams, but they did take a big step in the right direction, finishing atop the Sun Belt West. For all its losses, the defense under third-year coordinator Dontae Wright can still be counted on to hold up its end of the bargain. If the revamped offense follows suit — a big if, largely hinging on Crowder's health and consistency — a fourth trip to the SBC Championship Game in five years is within reach.

2025 RESULTS (8-6, 6-2 SBC)

Aug. 30	Nicholls	W	38-20
Sept. 6	at Clemson	L	16-27
Sept. 13	Memphis	L	7-28
Sept. 20	at Buffalo	W	21-17
Oct. 4	South Alabama (ot)	W	31-24
Oct. 11	at Texas State (ot)	W	48-41
Oct. 18	at ULM	W	37-14
Oct. 25	Louisiana	W	35-23
Nov. 1	Arkansas State	L	10-23
Nov. 13	at Old Dominion	L	0-33
Nov. 22	Georgia State	W	31-19
Nov. 29	at Southern Miss	W	28-18
Dec. 5	at James Madison #	L	14-31
Dec. 16	vs. Jacksonville St. %	L	13-17

#SBC Championship %Salute to Veterans Bowl

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	Sam Houston
Sept. 12	Alabama State
Sept. 19	at Missouri
Sept. 26	at Utah State
Oct. 6	Southern Miss
Oct. 17	at Louisiana
Oct. 24	ULM
Oct. 29	at James Madison
Nov. 7	Louisiana Tech
Nov. 14	at South Alabama
Nov. 21	Georgia Southern
Nov. 28	at Arkansas State

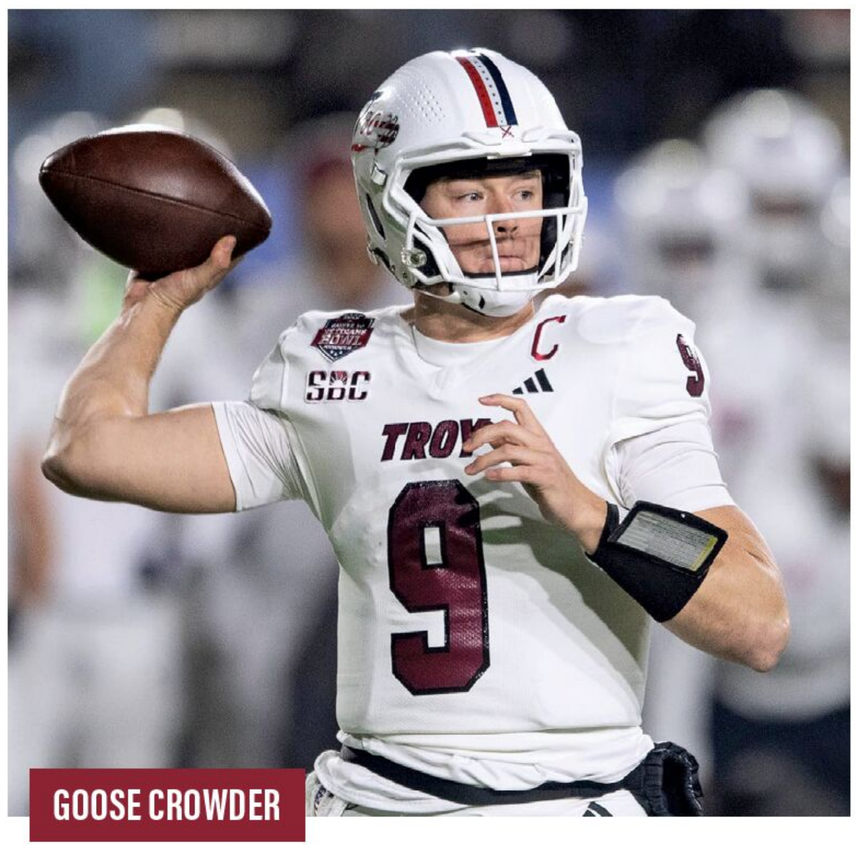
TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Dontaye Bush, EDGE	★★★
2.	Jermaine McCree, CB	★★★
3.	Jaxon Penn, CB	★★★
4.	Keivay Foster, S	★★★
5.	Noreel White, WR	★★★
6.	Lonnie Smith, EDGE	★★★
7.	Hayden Jackson, WR	★★★
8.	Nick Hampton, TE	★★★
9.	Corey Dudley Jr., OT	★★★
10.	Jeremiah Roux, ATH	★★★

*Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Gerad Parker • Record at School: 12-14 (2 years)
Career Record: 12-20 (2+ years) • Offensive Coordinator: Adam Austin
Defensive Coordinator: Dontae Wright • Location: Troy, Ala.
Stadium: Veterans Memorial Stadium (30,470)



GOOSE CROWDER

JAKE CRANDALL/ ADVERTISER

SCOUTING THE TROJANS

"I would imagine they've won big with three different coaches recently because of the funding of the program and the location where they can recruit. ... They lost a lot of production, but they did return some key pieces. At quarterback, the two guys that started, Tucker Kilcrease and Goose Crowder, are both back. We went into our game against Kilcrease thinking he'd be more of a game manager, but he actually made some plays and went out and won it for them. I don't know how they're gonna play it with those guys back. ... I thought [safety] Justin Powe was a good player and he's back. Then they have a receiver, Mojo Dortch, who had a season-ending injury last year, but I think he's a guy to watch for a breakout year."

— An opposing Sun Belt assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)

WR	5	Mojo Dortch (Sr.)	7	Kristian Tate (Sr.)
WR	4	Noreel White* (So.)	81	Jah'Marren Jackson (Fr.)
WR	15	TJ Lott* (Jr.)	2	Jywon Boyd (So.)
LT	**58**	**ELIJAH PRATHER (JR.)**	77	Darion Rivers* (Jr.)
LG	50	Luke Petit* (Sr.)	72	Patrick Screws Jr. (Jr.)
C	65	Tyler Cappi (Sr.)	73	Tyler Bell (Jr.)
RG	55	Jordon Jones* (Sr.)	71	Antwone Breland* (So.)
RT	**74**	**TRA'JON TOWNSEND (JR.)**	**54**	**CALEB ASH (SO.)**
TE	88	Jackson Worley (Jr.)		JaCorey Whitted* (So.)
QB	**9**	**GOOSE CROWDER (SR.)**	10	Tucker Kilcrease (Sr.)
RB	1	Jordan Lovett (Jr.)	0	Gavin Griffin* (Jr.)

DEFENSE (1)

DE	69	Jermaine Paramore (So.)	25	Kavion Henderson* (So.)
DT	0	Kam Curry (Sr.)	93	RaKeem Davis* (Jr.)
DT	11	Ty Clemons* (Sr.)	95	Miquon Merriweather* (Jr.)
BANDIT	22	Donnie Smith (Sr.)	5	Lonnie Smith* (Jr.)
LB	44	Luke Hodge (Sr.)	15	Keno Jones* (Sr.)
LB	2	Bryce Steele* (Sr.)	4	TJ Thompson (Sr.)
CB	1	Jabari Strait (Sr.)	12	Shemar Welch (So.)
CB	14	Jonathan Pennix* (Jr.)	17	Marlin Odom (So.)
SPEAR	18	Jordan Perry (Sr.)	3	Doug Nelson* (Jr.)
SS	**6**	**JUSTIN POWE (SR.)**	8	Marcus Goree Jr.* (So.)
FS	29	Joe Lott (So.)	10	Knai Cook* (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	38	Hayden Wolfe* (Jr.)	KR	4 Noreel White* (So.)
P	28	Evan Crenshaw (Sr.)	PR	4 Noreel White* (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

AIDAN ARMENTA

SCOUTING THE WARHAWKS

"That place is a tough place to win, man. We don't have a ton of funding right now, and I know that they're even worse off than we are. It's difficult, and [head coach] Bryant Vincent has tried to make something out of it. ... This year, it's tough to know what they're gonna look like, but it feels like the same shape that it's been in the past couple years. They signed more than 20 juco guys and then another 20 portal guys. It's a new roster. [Quarterback] Aiden Armenta is back. He manages the game. He can run a little bit, and he lets them do some different things. They lost their running back, Bam McReynolds, to UAB, and I thought he was a really good player."

— An opposing Sun Belt assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)

WR	7	Nic Trujillo (Jr.)	5	Brandon Buckhaulter (Sr.)
WR	88	Marcellus Jackson* (So.)	9	LT Robinson* (Jr.)
WR	**4**	**JP COULTER (SR.)**	6	Damarcco Blanton* (So.)
LT	60	David Applewhite (Jr.)	69	Bright Fagbamiye* (Sr.)
LG	61	Kaliem Croswell (Sr.)	54	Nate Green (So.)
C	72	Sean Dugery* (Sr.)	64	Drew Hutchinson (Sr.)
RG	66	Nolan Anderson* (Jr.)	62	Adameon Botley (Sr.)
RT	**67**	**AJ VINSON (SR.)**	68	Quentis Griffin Jr. (Sr.)
TE	8	Bryce Anderson* (Jr.)	89	Cade Callahan* (Jr.)
QB	**10**	**AIDAN ARMENTA (JR.)**	9	Landon Graves (Jr.)
RB	20	Donald Chaney Jr.* (Sr.)	1	Derrick Jameson* (Jr.)

DEFENSE (2)

DE	92	James Smith (Sr.)	44	CJ Wilson Jr.* (Sr.)
DT	**45**	**CLIFF MOSLEY (SR.)**	35	Ethan Bailey (So.)
DT	95	Levontae Jacobs (Sr.)	90	Zyan Tremont* (Jr.)
EDGE	9	Jaeden Calender (Jr.)	4	Derek Omoregie (Sr.)
OLB	1	Jabari Tiller (Sr.)	19	Le'Kell McGowan* (Jr.)
MLB	10	Rickey Banks* (Jr.)	22	Fred Clark (Fr.)
OLB	**3**	**NOAH FLEMMINGS (SR.)**	30	Marcus Ross (Sr.)
CB	5	Zy Jackson (Sr.)	20	Jordyn Williams (So.)
CB	13	Armoni Rue* (Sr.)	25	Navarion Benson (Sr.)
S	21	Lynard Harris (Jr.)	28	Larell Howling* (So.)
S	2	Korian Wilson (Sr.)	8	Carl Fauntroy (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	99	Max Larson (Sr.)	KR	4 JP Coulter (Sr.)
P	47	Makenzie Ryan (Jr.)	PR	4 JP Coulter (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD** • *2026 TRANSFER

DAVID LEONG-IMAGN IMAGES

ULM WARHAWKS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 131 | SUN BELT WEST PREDICTION: 7 | 2025 RECORD: 3-9, 1-7 SBC

OFFENSE ULM ranked near the bottom of the Sun Belt in both total offense and scoring offense in head coach Bryant Vincent's second season, averaging only 323.5 yards and 16.6 points per game during a 3-9 campaign that represented a step back from a five-win season in 2024. Returning starting quarterback Aidan Armenta (1,628 passing yards, 12 TDs, eight INTs) will try to improve a passing game that finished dead last in the league in yards per game (160.4). Nic Trujillo (23 receptions, 368 yards, four TDs) returns at wide receiver, but much of the receiving corps is largely unproven. Memphis transfer tight end Bryce Anderson could help with the pass-catching duties.

ULM's strength was running the ball, but the Warhawks must replace leading rusher Zach Palmer-Smith. Former Louisville and Miami (Fla.) running back Donald Chaney Jr. was one of a few transfer portal additions to the Warhawks' backfield.

Returning starting tackle AJ Vinson will anchor an offensive line that has to replace four starters.

DEFENSE ULM improved defensively last season, finishing sixth in the Sun Belt in total defense (384.8 ypg). The Warhawks were more balanced than they had been the previous season, allowing just 162.6 rushing yards and 222.3 passing yards per game. But they do have some pieces to replace on the defensive line and in the secondary.

The linebacker position has a few returning players who were part of the rotation last season, including Noah Flemmings and Marcus Ross. There are four new faces in the secondary, including corner Armoni Rue, a former junior-college All-American who appeared in five games for UTEP last season.

SPECIALISTS ULM might have a kicking competition on its hands. Max Larson is back after missing 2025 with an injury. Jacob Chambless returns for his second season, while Abram Murray transferred in from Cal. Makenzie Ryan will hold down punting duties after averaging 38.8 yards per punt as a sophomore.

FINAL ANALYSIS Vincent's first season (2024) was promising, as ULM started 5-1 before losing its last six. Last season was similar, with the Warhawks unable to capitalize on a 3-1 start, losing their last eight and going 1-7 in the Sun Belt. Vincent made several staff changes in the offseason, particularly on offense, adding offensive coordinator Jesse Montalto in addition to the portal pickups at receiver to try to jumpstart the passing game. If the defense can continue to build on its 2025 gains, ULM could get back in the bowl conversation.

2025 RESULTS (3-9, 1-7 SBC)

Aug. 28	Saint Francis (Pa.)	W	29-0
Sept. 6	at Alabama	L	0-73
Sept. 20	at UTEP	W	31-25
Sept. 27	Arkansas State	W	28-16
Oct. 4	at Northwestern	L	7-42
Oct. 11	at Coastal Carolina	L	8-23
Oct. 18	Troy	L	14-37
Oct. 25	at Southern Miss	L	21-49
Nov. 1	Old Dominion	L	6-31
Nov. 15	South Alabama	L	14-26
Nov. 22	at Texas State	L	14-31
Nov. 29	at Louisiana (ot)	L	27-30

2026 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	at Mississippi State
Sept. 12	at UAB
Sept. 19	SE Louisiana
Sept. 26	Florida Atlantic
Oct. 3	at South Alabama
Oct. 17	Louisiana Tech
Oct. 24	at Troy
Oct. 31	Southern Miss
Nov. 7	at Arkansas State
Nov. 12	Louisiana
Nov. 21	at Appalachian State
Nov. 28	Marshall

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Gavin Howard, ATH	★★★
2.	Jeremyah Green, IOL	★★★
3.	Marcellus Jackson, WR	★★★
4.	Van Martinez, IOL	★★★
5.	DJ Jester, S	★★★
6.	Freddie Gavin Jr., IOL	★★★
7.	Jonathan Crain, CB	★★★
8.	Mike Williams, WR	★★★
9.	Edarius Green, IOL	★★★
10.	Dalen Huston, WR	★★★

Per Rivals

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Bryant Vincent • Record at School: 8-16 (2 years) • Career Record: 15-22 (3 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Jesse Montalto • Defensive Coordinator: Troy Reffett • Location: Monroe, La. • Stadium: Malone Stadium (27,617)

MUST-SEE REVENGE GAMES

Revenge games come in all shapes and sizes. Typically, they are an opportunity for a team to avenge a loss from the prior season. But with the proliferation of transfer portal player movement and coaching changes — especially in the same conference — there are ample opportunities for revenge on the 2026 college football calendar. **BY KYLE WOOD**

LSU AT OLE MISS (SEPT. 19)

Games don't get much more spiteful than this. Lane Kiffin's SEC opener as the Tigers' new head coach — and as public enemy No. 1 in Oxford — is at Vaught-Hemingway Stadium.

Kiffin left the Rebels amid the best season in program history to take the top job at LSU. Then Ole Miss and head coach Pete Golding went on a run to the College Football Playoff semifinals. Kiffin convinced several players and coaches to follow him to Baton Rouge, upping the stakes for their return.

Remember the warm welcome Tennessee fans gave Kiffin in his return to Knoxville more than a decade after he left? That might look tame compared to how the Rebels receive him.

OHIO STATE AT INDIANA (OCT. 17)

Ahead of a highly anticipated bout between his alma mater and the Buckeyes in 2024, former Hoosiers quarterback Trent Green said: "It's hard to say it's a rivalry when it's been so one-sided." Ohio State won that game to extend its win streak in the series to 30.

Last fall, though, Indiana struck back. The Hoosiers toppled the reigning champion Buckeyes in the Big Ten Championship Game en route to an undefeated season and their first national title. Indiana lost several stars from that storied team, including Heisman Trophy-winning quarterback Fernando Mendoza. However, the Hoosiers stocked up in the transfer portal to make a run at a repeat.

The Buckeyes return a loaded roster of their own, and the folks in Columbus have surely had enough of all the Hoosiers hype.

GEORGIA AT OLE MISS (NOV. 7)

The Rebels have quietly emerged as the Bulldogs' kryptonite. Ole Miss is the only SEC team other than Alabama to beat Georgia in the past five seasons. That includes when Trinidad Chambliss and the Rebels sent the Bulldogs packing in the CFP quarterfinals.

Georgia has won back-to-back SEC titles, and no FBS team has more wins this decade. Still, the Bulldogs have gone one-and-done in their past two CFP trips and haven't won a playoff game since the 2023 national championship.

TEXAS VS. OKLAHOMA (OCT. 10)

The Red River Rivalry doesn't need any extra fuel. It got some anyway when Longhorns receiver Parker Livingstone — Arch Manning's roommate — transferred to play for the Sooners. Texas has had the upper hand in the series, winning three of the past four, including a 23-6 win in 2025. Still, Oklahoma got the last laugh with a CFP appearance.

The hype for the Longhorns may well have been a season early. After opening 2025 as a title contender, the 2026 team may have the goods to deliver on those expectations. But with quarterback John Mateer back, and Livingstone having traded in burnt orange for crimson and cream, the Sooners should not be slept on.

DUKE AT MIAMI (FLA.) (NOV. 14)

There are layers to this budding beef. The Blue Devils just won the ACC, something the Hurricanes still haven't done. Still, it was Miami that represented the conference in the CFP and advanced to the national championship game. There's also the matter of Mario Cristobal replacing former Canes head coach Manny Diaz, who's in charge at Duke.

And here's the kicker: Blue Devils quarterback Darian Mensah transferred to Miami, a move that led to a lawsuit. Duke will surely have revenge on its mind when it marches into Miami, but the acquisition of Mensah (and his top receiver Cooper Barkate) ensures that the Canes have a roster ready to run the ACC.

AYRTON BRECKENRIDGE/CLARION LEDGER

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CALLING ALL WHISKEY LOVERS

From bourbon to Scotch to Japanese whisky, it's a spirited world—and it keeps getting bigger. Whether you're just a burgeoning fan or have a well-stocked bar, ***Men's Journal*** is here to help you find your perfect dram.

We've launched our own curated **Whiskey Shop**, which features everything from everyday pours to exclusive single barrels.

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MEN'S JOURNAL

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